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# NEPAL, LAND OF MYSTERY

*by*

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## CONTENTS

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
i. Flight to the East	9
ii. The Indian of the Sands	14
iii. Monks and Elephants	36
iv. The Hill of the Snake	46
v. The Bitter Burma Road	52
vi. We Breach the Forbidden Land	58
vii. The Land of the Eye	68
viii. Khatmandu	95
ix. The Place of the Dead	123
x. September 3, 1939	139



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>Facing page</i>
Magical tattooing	48
Hsa-Pu kisses her god	49
He was very holy ("crumby", said Jack)	64
Corner in Khatmandu	65
The gold statue of Bhupatindra Mall	112
Narain, the God of the Miracle, floating in his bed of serpents	113
The gardens of the Maharajah of Nepal	128
My little girl	129



## CHAPTER I

### FLIGHT TO THE EAST

OUR adventures in Asia took place before the 1939 War. Armand Denis and his wife, Leila Roosevelt, were to make a new film in the East, and the first lap of the journey was to be travelled by plane. I was to go with them, together with Leroy G. Phelps and John Kenney. I was to take the still photographs and there might, Armand had said, be a book in it for me.

I had met Armand ten years before in Bali making with his father-in-law, André Roosevelt, and his wife, Leila, that first fine film of native life called "Goona Goona" here, and "Kris" in Europe. Six feet four he was, lean and hard in body as he was in wit, and he had been a scientist, an explorer, a soldier, a monk, at various times in his strange career. He had directed the moving picture of one of Frank Buck's expeditions, and recently produced two of his own, "Wheels Across Africa" and "Dark Rapture," the latter acclaimed the finest travel film ever made. His wife had gone on all the expeditions except Buck's; while Armand was away on that one she upped and drove a truck around the world.

They were an amazing pair, and complemented each other perfectly. Organization and execution, a flair for discerning the taste of the intellectuals as well as that of the simple public, courage and perseverance were blended in the amalgam of Leila and Armand. I had noted years ago that Leila's pockets were always bulging with cigarettes and never a match, that Armand's were stuffed with matches and never a cigarette. They were perfect co-operatives.

Of the other members, Roy Phelps had been cameraman with Armand on several trips already, a quiet fellow, thorough, intrepid. He was to be my tent-mate. Jack Kenney, our mechanic, had never been out of the United States, but we were to see him adapt himself as blithely as a chameleon to the strange

lands we should explore. Jack's tough Irish fibre and un-Irish disposition were to be our props in many a predicament.

Leila said good-bye to the four children whom I never could believe were really hers, and joined us in New York, as fresh and eager as always. I had met her occasionally during those years since Bali, and between-whiles learned of her adventures through her father, André (first cousin to old Teddy), with whom I had spent two years in Paris working on "Goona Goona" and "Kris". Leila was to become the only woman explorer I had ever known who could remain sane, attractive, and charming after two weeks in the mud on a diet of cabbage soup.

Our itinerary was complex. Jack and Roy left immediately by ship for Burma taking the three cars, two specially equipped Dodge sedans and a one-ton Dodge truck. Armand and Leila sailed two weeks later for Holland. I was to leave the week after that to join them in Amsterdam and fly with them to Burma. Quentin Young, our guide for China, was to come from Hong Kong and meet us all at Rangoon. That we all did meet within the space of sixteen hours should serve as a primary lesson to those who would like to be leaders of expeditions when they grow up.

Our flight from Amsterdam to Rangoon took four days—Leipzig, Budapest, Athens, Alexandria, Lydda, Basra, Jodhpur, then over the Bay of Bengal to Burma, where we touched down at the aerodrome north of Rangoon and saw in the distance the immense Shwe Dagon.

Older than the Christian Church and still aspiring, as new generations add to its great height—it is now higher than St. Paul's Cathedral—the pagoda shines with a god's ransom in gold leaf, pasted fleck upon fleck by the pious whose wishes have been fulfilled at this shrine where eight hairs of Buddha are devotedly preserved.

We had descended deaf from heaven, and the drumming of the plane was still in our ears. Faintly above it we could hear the whining obbligato of the car that was bearing us to Rangoon, then a deeper resonance, the tolling of a temple

gong. A pyramid of illuminated gold lay ahead of us in the dark, the Shwe Dagon, then the lights of Rangoon City. Our ears clicked, and with the needle of pain which entered them rushed the clear sounds of our own earthen world, and we knew that our journey through time and space, that four days' fantasy, was done.

It was so damply hot on the hotel verandah that Leila was for a moment unaware of the cup of coffee I had upset in her lap.

"It's refreshing," she said at last.

Armand was hotter still. For a week we had been at the Grand Hotel, the best, we were told, in Rangoon, while he had sought by every conceivable means to confirm our permission to enter China by the Burma Road. The Chinese Embassy at Washington had assured him that Chungking had granted his request and that the necessary documents would be awaiting the expedition at Rangoon. The Chinese Consulate here had no knowledge of them. Mr. T. L. Soong, of the South-west Transportation Company, which alone controlled the petrol supplies on that military road, was unimpressed. We must wire Dr. Kung, Premier of China, said he, blithely. We had wired without result. We had pulled every string in Rangoon, and they had fallen apart in our hands.

We had shown our official recommendations from the United States Secretary of State, Mr. Cordell Hull, the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Belgian Ambassador to the Court of St. James, the Chinese Ambassador in Brussels, as well as personal letters from President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, Leila's cousins. Our Chinese interpreter and guide, Quentin Young, who had known many of the official Chinese intimately, was unable to understand why his country, so eager for foreign sympathy, should first accept and then deny an expedition which could be relied upon, because of the proven sympathy and probity of each of its members, to produce a film record of China at War which should be a powerful influence for help abroad. Quentin held his lean, sensitive face in his hands.

"We are confused," he groaned. "We are so confused."

We were worse than confused. We were frantic with impatience to get our work started, and we were hot as hell.

We dined at the Pegu Club and the Gymkhana Club with Mr. Austin Brady, our admirable Consul, who was exerting every pressure possible to him. Under Leila's supervision we packed food and equipment into our three stout Dodges. We spent days at the zoo, fanatic animal fanciers that all of us were.

At night we wandered among the stalls of Fraser Street where Chinese, Burmese, and East Indians sold abominable junk from Germany and Japan. Rusted tools, flashlights, oleographs, cotton shirts, soda pop, mirrors, combs, coin-silver bracelets, ear-cleaning accessories were sold in open booths surrounding each of the many cinema places. We wandered desolately grateful for the breeze which came by night, and waited and waited.

"We'll wait two days longer," said Armand, "then we'll start for China anyway. There is a lot I want to do in Burma, and the permit may be at the border waiting for us."

Patiently we waited. We dined with charming people. We fed sacred fish in the monastery ponds. We sat with Gin Gimlets, which have the effect of their name, in the native cafés and gazed gloomily at the twinkling silver rings on the sturdy toes of the waiters. And on the night before we were to leave, permits or no, we drove to see the great Shwe Dagon Pagoda, the most venerable place of worship in all the Indo-Chinese lands.

The golden cone, three hundred and seventy feet in height, was illuminated by spotlights which the wealthy and devout had bought, so that it was reflected in the Royal Lake below. We removed our shoes respectfully and climbed the cool steps, the many hundreds of them, which approached by a gentle gradient the heart of the shrine. Vendors of sweets and pretzels and crisp pancakes, of flowers for offerings, and little brass gongs, for calling Buddha's attention, squatted along the way. A blind beggar sat in a circle of scarlet stains—the spoor of the betel-nut addict—and by the light of

lanterns behind him the merchant of this friendly drug sold chunks of it upon a copper tray, priests in saffron robes preceded us, and a shaven nun in magenta surplice sought to insure us merit hereafter by inducing us to give her alms.

A great resonance, faint at first filled the night as we climbed, the stroking and the beating of the many bells with which the pilgrims asserted their prayers. We reached the flagged platform around the plinth of the pagoda, on which was a jumble of ancient Buddhas of stone and wood, of gongs and dragons and monsters, half man half lion. High altars stood everywhere with hundreds of tapers burning on them. From the tops of tall posts streamers fluttered against the smooth gold sides of the Shwe Dagon, and here and there pilgrims were pasting squares of gold leaf upon the temple. There was a soft rumble like that of a sea in a cave, as pilgrims of all ages struck their foreheads to the flagstones and muttered their prayers. And we followed a monk with his lantern through the medley confused and not a little awed until we found ourselves on the stairs again.

## CHAPTER II

### THE INDIAN OF THE SANDS

It was five in the morning, but Rangoon was already awake to enjoy these few hours of coolness. So were the porters, the houseboys, the lift boys, the boot-blacks, the waiters, the night watchmen, the barmen, and several others, clustered around our three Dodges for a final tipping. We were ready to start at last, Armand and Leila in the first car, Roy and I in the second, Jack and Quentin in the truck. A handsome caravan we made, I thought, though a little too shiny still; the three cars looked sleek and powerful, matter-of-fact, modest with the small lettering of the Denis-Roosevelt Asiatic Expedition on their sides. Each had a platform on top with a hatch leading to it. The back seats of the sedans had been removed to make room for baggage, and the truck was equipped with food and tool compartments running the length of each side.

Armand honked his horn twice; I honked mine; Jack replied. We were off.

We wound through the streets of Rangoon, driving unaccustomedly on the left side of the road. We followed the Prome Road north, more or less paralleling the great Irawadi River where the flying fishes never play. It was flat country, monotonously flat and green, a two-dimensional landscape of paddy-fields stretching to the horizon on every side.

As we worked farther north the land became more varied, ridges of red laterite breaking through the green, and areas of dwarfed, dark green jungle. For the first several nights we slept in the rest-houses of the Public Works Department. These were unfurnished except for table and chairs. We supplied our own cots and lights, cooked our own food on a petrol stove, and paid generally two rupees, about seventy-two cents apiece, for the shelter and the services of a *mali*, or houseboy,

We drove slowly northwards, away from the highroad and

the rest-houses now, to film the life of the natives who had not been influenced by Rangoon and Mandalay. We came to Kyaukpadaung and then to Mount Popa, the home of the most powerful *nats*—good and evil spirits—in Burma. In a great dark valley there was a river, the natives said, which flowed uphill as a sort of escalator for the lazy water *nats*, but it would not flow uphill for us, whose vision of fairyland had been dimmed very long ago. There was a cave here with Buddhas and relics to which offerings were made, and a wandering path leading from it to a promontory where a pagoda and its monastery were perched high above the plains.

As we drove on we were filled with the peace of Burma, a kindly land, we thought, with a religion even gentler than Christianity. We were beginning to believe that Burma was almost too peaceful for the purpose of our film, when we came to the *chaung*, or ford, on one of the branches of the Irawadi. It was evening, and the rain was slapping like bullets at our windshields. Armand was riding with Roy and me to discuss certain sequences of the film.

"We had better test that sand," he said, "though it looks safe enough."

I walked half-way across the river, following the stakes which had been placed in it by the Public Works Department, as the P.W.D. upon them indicated. The wet sand seemed firm enough.

"It's all right," I said. Armand took the wheel and Roy and I climbed on to the roof for a better view through the howling storm. We could scarcely see the woods of the farther shore.

We started across confidently, following the markers. We had reached the middle of the river when I heard the engine racing and saw with horror that we were not going forward at all. One side of the car began to settle.

"Hell! It's quicksand!" Armand yelled. Something like cold quicksand ran down my spine. Armand tried vainly to back the car, to rock it, but we only settled deeper. I shielded my eyes to see the farther shore. There, placidly watching us, was a group of Karen men.

We shouted at them. They simply stared.

"They must have buffaloes," said Roy.

I shouted again. I offered fifty rupees if they would pull us out.

Armand shoved up an oil-funnel. "Try this! Offer them a hundred!"

Using the funnel as a megaphone we offered a hundred, but the Karen's remained squatting on the shore. Lightning without thunder tore gashes in the sky, making them look like lavender ghosts.

"By God, they're wreckers!" Armand gritted. "They're going to let us sink!" That, obviously, was what they were going to do. The rain could not hurt their naked hides. They could wait patiently. What an ass I had been, I thought, not to have followed the markers all the way across the river. They must have been deliberately misplaced for the purpose of entrapping cars.

"Two hundred rupees!" I shouted through the funnel. I knew my accent was formidable, but they must have understood, for three of them simply shrugged and stretched out at full length in the shelter of a lean-to, puffing gigantic cheroots into brass pots to protect them from the rain.

"Three hundred!" Roy yelled in both Burmese and English. The rain drove horizontally at our throats. The water came snaking through the sands beneath us, sliding from wheel to wheel, forming little pools here and there and spreading bright tentacles from one to another. The river was rising with the storm, and we knew that unless we escaped in the next few minutes the Denis-Roosevelt Asiatic Expedition would disappear without a trace right here. Perhaps I should get a magnesium shot of this, I thought; seal the film back in its metal container and let it drift downstream. Posthumous pictures were better than none. By now I could scarcely see for the rain stung and blurred my eyes.

Armand's long arm came shooting up through the dark and flailed about furiously as he yelled, "Make it three fifty!"

Roy trumpeted through the funnel again. I slid to the running board. Wet sand ground beneath my feet and I knew that we were sinking faster into it.

"Four hundred!" I yelled desperately, as it occurred to me that that was cheap for the chance to live.

"Five hundred!" Leila shouted from the car behind, but her voice barely reached me. Then we were all shouting at once clinging to the sides of the cars like rats. And suddenly, in a splotch of lightning, we saw a strange figure standing amidst the Karens ashore.

It was nude except for a loin cloth and a feathered war bonnet which was considerably wilted by the rain. This was incredible, I thought; an American Indian, in costume, in Burma? He raised his hand dramatically, and the natives edged away when his voice boomed out to us:

"Who are you?"

Armand recovered first. "Listen! Five hundred rupees! . . ." I felt the car lurch farther into the sands. "If you get us out of this! . . . Who are we? . . . Armand Denis . . . Leila Roosevelt . . . Americans!"

The Indian, or whatever he was, bawled orders to the Karens; lightning slapped across them, and we saw them dragging wide planks with which to make a bridge over the quicksands. They slid out on their bellies and tied a coconut fibre rope to our car, then noosed it around the chests of three buffaloes with which obviously they were accustomed to pull out cars, just like this, when their owners could pay handsomely for towage.

When Leila's car and Jack's truck were safely ashore Armand strode up belligerently to the Indian. "Now, who the devil are you? If you don't mind my saying so, you look damn silly in that masquerade!"

"Me? Chief Michael Joseph Thunderface," said the Indian promptly. "California Mission College, '21. Indian. This isn't a masquerade; it's my forefathers' feathers. It scares people." He grinned broadly.

The man was mad, I thought, but we certainly had better humour him.

"I've hunted with Indians," said Jack "and he looks all right to me. Say, have you got a smoke on you?"

Thunderface grunted in the best Indian manner, and led

us to the second incongruous apparition of the night, a typical canvas wigwam in the centre of a group of huts. Buffalo and bear were painted on the walls of it, and through the opening at the top a thick column of smoke mushroomed against the rain. It was immaculate inside, cosy and warm with the small fire ascending straight. We sat on hides while Thunderface carefully dried his forefathers' feathers, one by one, then wrapped the bonnet lovingly in a soft deerskin envelope.

"Here's your smoke," he said, offering Burmese cheroots which only Jack was man enough to accept. Armand looked as though he still were thinking of those five hundred rupees.

"You're Mr. Denis?" Thunderface smiled at him. "Forget the money. I don't run a racket like that, and since I've been headman of this village the men have done much less of it. Anyway, you're Americans."

We blinked at one another, and Thunderface explained. He had travelled through India with his own Wild West Show some ten years ago, and bad luck had progressively befallen him. First he had had to sell his horses, then one by one his troop had slipped away, and finally, when his wife and daughter died of cholera in Central India he had come to Burma to train boxers and race-horses. This venture had failed, so with a bag of amateur conjuring apparatus he had worked north from Rangoon, shopping for a village worthy of him, until he found it here and after various vicissitudes became its headman. Unlike a European gone native, however, he had lost none of his racial or moral pride. He was a Chief in his own right, and the only true American in Burma, as the long-expired passport he showed us proved.

"And you're one of the Roosevelts," he said to Leila. "That's pretty good. What's this exhibition of yours trying to do out here?"

"We are looking," Armand replied, declining another cheroot, "for good adventure material of some cultural interest. There must be plenty of it in Burma. Now if you could only direct us to the Hill of the Sacred Snakes . . ."

"You mean serpents?" asked Thunderface.

"Snakes," said Armand, who dislikes a quibble. "The

snake, specifically, called the King Cobra or Hamadryad, or, sometimes, Ophiophagus, because it eats its own kind. There's a legend, you know, and old Hurston, the missionary, claimed to have visited the sacred hill where the snakes were worshipped.

"I've heard that story," said Thunderface, "but I never believed it. They tell me the Naga business died out in Burma a thousand years ago. Still there are two old temples, which they call snake temples, at the dead city of Pagan. There's always a monk hanging around them, and he might know. The rain has stopped now. I'll go with you if you like."

We jumped at the chance. Pagan was only a few miles away. We had had no supper and were exhausted by the struggle with the quicksand, but here was the most likely lead to the sacred hill that we yet had had. We set off immediately for Pagan, the city of the dead.

Thunderface rode with us, befouling the night with his cheroot, while I told him the little we knew of the ancient snake cult and the lost mountain, or hill, which was still, reputedly, devoted to it. The Naga, the sacred serpent, is revered from India to the Malay Archipelago, but its worship in Burma was very brief, and it came as news to me that there still existed Naga temples at Pagan. The sacred snake mountain, mythical perhaps, had attracted us like pilgrims rather than professional moving picture producers, and after sifting and collating the various legends current it seemed that our chances of testing them were pretty fair.

Most credible of all reports was that of Hurston, a hundred years ago, who visited the animist tribes at the foot of a bare black mountain near "Kensi" in the hope of converting them. He described a narrow, serpentine stairway which apparently wound up the pinnacle but which he was forbidden to approach. Other investigators, chiefly military men on holiday, sought to identify the district from Hurston's scant notes, but they met with such hostility on the part of the natives, who admitted the legend but refused guidance, that they never got even as far as Hurston's "Kensi".

"Look," said Thunderface, "the old city, Pagan."

Bleached as bones beneath the moon ahead of us lay the ruins of what had once been Burma's capital city, five thousand stupas, pagodas, temples dating from A.D. 108 and spread over a hundred square miles.

Even the great lost cities of Indo-China cannot boast such a multitude of stately ruins as are found at Pagan; and Jerusalem, Rome, Kiev, Benares, have none of them so many temples, or temples of such lavish design. The walled city of Pagan was built in A.D. 847 and by A.D. 1284 had extended its empire from the Gulf of Martaban to the border of Southern China and from the Bay of Bengal to Cambodia. Most of the temples were built between A.D. 1057 and A.D. 1284. It is interesting to note that Marco Polo, whose yarns are often discredited, described Mien, or Pagan, as "a great and noble city, the head of the kingdom," and was impressed by its towers "built in pyramid fashion". These are certainly the Pagan pagodas, for "upon the top, round about the balls many little gold and silver bells were hung, which at the blowing of the wind, gave a certain sound".

It is said that in the days of Pagan's glory the pagodas and shrines and monasteries could be counted by the myriad; even now the remains of five thousand can still be traced. The ground is so thickly studded with them that you can scarcely move a foot without touching some sacred object made by the adroit hands of the Paganese. The old but still valuable work of Yule, *The Mission to Ava* lists the variety of these decrepit shrines: "The bell-shaped pyramid of dead brickwork; the same raised over a square or octagonal cell containing an image of the Buddha";—we saw several of these, the roofs fallen off, the intact Buddhas looking as though they were sitting in their baths—"the bluff, knob-like dome of the Ceylon Dago-bats, with the square cap which seems to have characterized the most ancient Buddhist chaityas, as represented in the sculptures at Sanchi, and in the ancient model pagodas found near Buddhist remains in India; the fantastic *bu-paya*, or pumpkin pagoda, which seemed rather like a fragment of what we might conceive the architecture of the moon than anything terrestrial, and many variations on these types. But the pre-

dominant and characteristic form is that of the cruciform vaulted temple."

The temples of Ananda, Ta-pyi-nyu, and Gawdapalin are of this type, powerful and graceful structures amidst that graveyard of temple bones. Around them gradually rise—as far as we could see by moonlight—wasted towers, terraced shrines of ethereal fretwork, huge bulbous onions of architecture through which jackals slink.

That night we slept in the rest-house which had been built for Edward the Seventh's visit, an arc of a place with triple *punkahs* in every room—vast curtains hung from the ceiling and swung by coolies to ruffle the torpid air. We filmed Pagan at dawn, scarcely a moving picture, and headed west with Thunderface who seemed glad of this respite from salvaging cars.

The Kya Lap Sing, the Black Valley or Valley-Night, lay somewhere between the great Salween River and one of its tributaries, according to Thunderface, but the tributary varied continually as the natives along the way informed or misinformed us. All we could ascertain was that it was close to the Siamese border. The roads grew worse. We bounced over cyclopean boulders and crawled through mud like mucilage. Leeches clung to us whenever we left the cars, and each night we burned them from each other's bodies.

We were in none too good a humour when we camped one night near the village of Toungbyoung at the foot of a jungly hill. The mosquitoes were terrible, but even their droning could not keep me awake. It must have been towards morning that I became conscious of an unpleasant sound vibrating through my dreams. I opened my eyes and at first could see only the white blur of the mosquito net. My blanket was in ridges beneath me. My cheek throbbed with the bites of mosquitoes—anopheles, probably—that had found their way beneath the loosened net. Gradually I could see that Roy in the other cot was up on an elbow listening as I was. His voice came to me in a whisper:

"That groaning will drive me crazy. I haven't slept a wink."

We listened, and I sat up, throwing back the net so I could see the clear pattern of bamboo and palm beyond the tent, and the tropical constellations tattooed in silver across the sky. The groaning had stopped for a moment, and again I was aware of the lovely tinkling of pagoda bells near by, the countless little bells suspended from the *hti* or iron parasol at the peak of the temple, ring beneath ring of them, to sing to Buddha in the slightest wind.

Then the groaning began again, not a hundred feet away, and the melody of the temple bells was drowned by it.

"Come on," said Roy. "We've got to find out about this."

We pulled on pants and shirts, and walked cautiously past the other tents towards the group of native huts. There was a light in one of them. A candle illuminated a small alabaster image of Buddha on a shelf. The shadow cast by it spread like an umbrella across the thatched ceiling and descended to the head of a boy lying naked on the floor. He was unconscious, but his groans came mightily as the youths surrounding him massaged his body with oil.

We waited quietly in the door until we were asked to enter. We stood over the boy and looked upon him with horror for his body was scarified with the fresh incisions of blue and red tattooing. From knees to waist there had been designed upon him an intricate web of lines, forming beasts and cabalistic characters, which in the mass suggested perfectly a pair of short blue trousers; and the cross-hatched red welts upon his chest, with the letters of the Burmese alphabet within them, resembled nothing so much as a crossword puzzle. Three of the cuts were suppurating and all were inflamed.

"Listen," said one of the youths, bending over his friend, "if you scratch yourself you will spoil this beautiful design. Lie quietly."

Another bent down. "You wiggle too much. Are you a little boy, then, and not a man?"

It was simple to guess what Roy was thinking. We knew that tattooing was more popular in Burma than anywhere else in the world, but so far we had seen little of it, for we were still too close to civilized Rangoon. As it was to film the indigenous

customs of the people that we had come on this expedition, this looked like an excellent scene for us.

I spoke to one of the attendant youths. "Would it be possible for us to see this done? Are there other men, exceptionally well tattooed, in the village of Toungbyoung?"

The boy poured more oil upon his friend's body and gently rubbed it in. "There are, sahib, but we are not really expert here. The tattooing is better as you go north. Go to the Shan States where every man and boy is tattooed all over. The best *saya* in the world lives up there somewhere, the Saya Maung whose special emblem is the dancing *nat*."

A *saya* was a tattooer, I already knew; a *nat* was a spirit.

"Can you tell us how to find him?"

"Sahib, none here can tell you that. He lives on an island, in a lake, they say. But it is far. The best way to find him is to look for the tattoo mark of the *nat* upon the people as you travel north, and ask them where he lives. And as you come nearer the lake, they say, you will meet men with more and more of these dancing *nats* upon them, so you will know you are going in the right way."

The tattooed youngster groaned again, twisting as the pain shot from symbol to symbol on his poor drugged body. We returned to camp and bed, excited at the thought of this strange quest.

Armand and Leila were as eager as we to add the chapter on Burmese tattooing to their film. The trail of the tattooed and the tattooer looked very promising, so long as it did not lead us too far from our most important objective, the hill of the snake.

We drove east again, following approximately the Pyeen River where a series of wooden water wheels, seventy-five feet high, irrigated the rice fields on the high banks. Except for the axles of teak they were made entirely of bamboo which had been stripped of its outer skin and soaked for months before being erected in the river. Built without a single nail and balanced so nicely that the slightest current would swoop the water into bamboo buckets and raise it to the irrigation trough, they were a marvellous example of primitive engineering.

The farther we went from the Irawadi, the main route of travel in Burma, the better and brighter became the tattooing of the natives, and bit by bit we learned its history and method and significance. Among the hill people we were entirely dependent upon Thunderface as interpreter, but whatever information he gathered we checked whenever we could with the occasional missionaries—to whom the custom was abominable.

I saw individual designs of many sorts, depending upon whether the tattooed wished mere adornments or magic, but the commonest were those of animals, rows of Buddhas, cabalistic letters and words, and geometrical figures. I noticed neither tattooed foliage, such as our sailors affect, nor anything that resembled a beloved's name. The older style and that still popular among the savage tribes was to cover the skin so thickly with figures that they seemed a solid mass of colour, but the tendency now is towards clarity of outline with sufficient plain background to set it off. Thus I noticed near Hsipaw a youth with one arm richly tattooed and the other quite bare except for a tattooed wrist-watch whose hands were set at five minutes past twelve—a moment which had doubtless been of importance to him, though he shied from me and would not have it commemorated on film.

When animals are drawn they are usually encircled by certain letters—called *s'ma*—of the Burmese alphabet and if the likeness is not unmistakable the name of the animal is added beneath. The mystic squares, or *in*, are placed across the shoulder blades, the Buddhas very often across the heart. Only two inks are used even now, the blue, made of lamp-black which lasts forever, and the red which fades, though its efficacy does not, for it is compounded of magical herbs and the pulverized skin of the *taukte* lizard, which is renowned even in India and Malaya for the good luck it heralds when it cries above a house.

Most of the charms tattooed are protective and are placed on that part of the body most vulnerable to specific dangers, even on top of the head, the hair being shaved for that purpose.

The *a-hpi se*, a protective charm, is known to schoolboys, who have it tattooed where they are generally caned, as they believe it lightens the weight of the rod. Though it still may smart, there is no convincing them that it would not hurt twice as much without the anaesthetic *a-hpi se* between themselves and justice. And when they grow to manhood a sprinkling of these same charms are supposedly efficacious against blows, bullets, and slashes of the *dah*, that herculean razor which all Shans carry, and which, in the hands of dacoits, accounts for nine-tenths of the murders in Burma. For this reason the *a-hpi se* is most frequently tattooed upon the belly, throat, and top of the head. The rate of *dah* murders, incidentally, seemed to remain constant at about one a day while we were in the country, but that was explained as the result of careless tattooing or the parsimony of those who would not travel to the master *saya* we had been told to seek in the jungly north.

We crossed the parallel ranges of central Burma, where the Taung Thu women wear ear-rings the size of carrots, and for a while we camped among the neighbouring Padaungs, the giraffe-necked people, whose throats are stretched and encased in spirals of brass. A few of these strange women had been imported as freaks to America, but had now returned to their native village of Pekkan in the hills. We left the cars at a small mission station and climbed for two days over the boulders which littered the way leading up to Pekkan. There were abysmal caves among them, each guarded by a *nat*, whose bamboo altar stood just inside. But the *nats* tolerated us; we slept at their doors beyond reach of the rain, and revered them with the incense of Leila's cooking.

We wondered, as we climbed, what effect the voyage to America could have had upon those Padaungs who made it. And when we neared the top we saw for ourselves: a woman dressed in typical Burmese wrap-around skirt and the sort of cotton blouse popular in Rangoon, plodding over the rocks with a burden as great as her own weight suspended from a strap across her forehead. Her neck, elongated grotesquely, was entirely bare. She had learned in America to be ashamed of the shame with which her own people regarded the naked

neck, and so had unwound the enormous brass coils which had earned her livelihood with us.

"If only we could get that scene?" said Armand. "Get them taking off those coils and settle at last the question as to whether their necks collapse, because they've worn these things since birth. There's evidence right there that the neck can somehow be strengthened again."

The Padaung village was of reed houses raised high on stilts, with tiny doors just beneath the ridge-poles and bamboo ladders leading up to them. It was not a friendly place. We were simply ignored as inconsequential while the villagers went blithely about their weaving and pounding of grain. The nude-necked women who had been in America performed a sort of curtsey when we passed, but they made it obvious that they distrusted us. I offered them candy made by the lowland people from the syrup of the Palmyra palm, and though they accepted it gladly enough they refused adamantly to let me look into the immense reed baskets, ten feet high, which stood by every hut and they were uninterested in selling us the coarse cotton cloth of their weaving. It was only when Armand presented each with an odorous jar of hair pomade that they became friendly, and brought their brass-bound sisters for us to film.

We chose one with coils from ankle to knee, from wrist to elbow and from collarbone to her squashed ears eight inches away, a surly maiden with long, drooping eyelids, and when the cameras were ready Jack went stalwartly to work on that incredible neck ornament. The girl grunted stoically; she would be well paid with pomade. Jack pulled like a boatman. He used all the leverage of his mechanic's science. He all but put his foot in the girl's eye to separate the first rings of that elastic coil.

We finally had to enlist two other brass-bound belles to do the job; and inch by inch, as they tugged in opposite directions, the spiral unwound. Now there was a foot of it swinging loose, now a yard and two yards, exposing a neck that was mottled white and blue from its long confinement. It didn't quite collapse. It wobbled a little like a top running

down until the girl supported it with her hands. No, it didn't hurt; it just felt cold, she said, and wrapped a cloth around it, concealing it decently. The fifteen pounds of brass wire would be straightened and replaced that same afternoon. We left the village with good film in the can, six hundred feet of it, and picking up the three cars again we drove through a strange landscape towards Kalaw. Sudden hills of great boulders, pocked with caves, rose from the fields about us. They seemed to have been artificially created by gigantic men. As far as we could see the plains were spotted with these towers and rough pyramids, and mysteriously between them lay fenced areas which were literally rock gardens, for though the fields outside the fence might be comparatively free of rocks, inside there was almost nothing else. The rocks looked as if they had been cultivated by whatever mad gods had arranged this fantastic land.

Whenever we stopped we noticed carefully the tattooing of the natives, looking for the dancing *nats* which would indicate that we were approaching the territory of the great Saya Maung. It was one late afternoon when we were despairing of finding either the *nats* or Hurston's snake cult that we first found the tattooing we sought on a gay old fellow who was leading his buffalo home from work, and talking to it. Three *nats*—looking like rabid marmosets—danced vigorously across his chest to avert the attention of all the evil *nats* which might afflict him. There would be no place for evil, he said, in the body of a man which was so patently devoted to joy.

He tugged at the rope which led to his buffalo's nostril, and leaned at ease upon the enormous horn. I looked more closely at that horn; it was actually two horns, one cemented on top of the other to add height to the man's prize beast. Throughout the Shan States the buffaloes were thus falsified with the horns of their ancestors.

Our caravan of cars, bristling with cameras, in no way daunted our *nat*-proofed old man.

"You will find the great Saya Maung on an island," he said, "which is in Lake Inle, which is near Taunggyi, which is at the foot of the next hills. Tell him that I, Chein Maw,

have been afflicted by no evil since he cut the charms upon me long ago. Oof!" he said, and turned round the buffalo by leaning on its nose.

At last we had something to go upon, for Taunggyi and Lake Inle were mapped. We had already planned to visit the lake to film the aquatic tribe who lived there, and, we had heard, paddled great canoes with their feet. But we went leisurely now, camping off the road at villages where the chiefs would help our research into the mysteries of tattooing.

It was hereabouts that I noticed men with little knobs and thick scars like mole tunnels across their chests, and I curiously sought their meaning. They were the *hkaung-beit-set*, a form of charm which was popular in India and had doubtless been imported from there.

The *hkaung-beit-set*, properly, was not the scar pattern itself, but a talisman of gold, silver, tortoise-shell, or a precious stone which had been placed in the slit flesh. Invariably it was carved with magic symbols, so that when the skin closed above it its properties were taken directly into the blood. It was not uncommon in ancient times for a soldier to slice out the *hkaung-beit-set* of his captive, thus at once obtaining loot of value and so dispiriting the de-charmed victim that he would divulge his army's plans.

Flat discs of gold, like buttons, are often inserted beneath the skin; these are marked in four quarters, with a character of the Burmese alphabet cut into each. One character symbolizes a fish, one a peacock, one a monkey, and one a crab, for these were the avatars of Buddha before he assumed the form of a man. They were wiser animals than all their fellows, the story states, and their emblems therefore impart a sum of wisdom to the hero whom they invisibly adorn.

We passed through Thazi, and up the mountains where pine and bamboo mingled until we reached Kalaw. There was air again here, not the sultry stuff of the valleys that we had been breathing. And there were the Palaungs, a curious people living midway between the Shans of the lowlands and the Kachins of the hills, whose women wore broad loose belts of solid silver over their hips, and many cane girdles. Unless

one has lived in the country it is impossible to distinguish the men of one tribe from those of almost any other, though ethnologically they may be quite unlike; it is the women who are distinctive by their costumes. But among the Palaungs we found the tattooing of the men to have a fantasy we had not met with before. The strange beasts drawn upon them were recognizable, to them, as supernatural tigers, and were charms against charms, a speciality of Palaung tattooing. The tattooed tigers could make you fall out of love, if you had been charmed into it and they could combat the terrible curse of "Man-made-little," which shrinks the soul in you until it rattles like a doll in the shell of your body.

No, said our Palaung chief, Lake Inle was not far now. Yes, the Saya Maung still lived.

We went down the mountains past a pond that had been designed by an early king to form the outline of a great crow flying. We camped at He-Ho, a town as jolly as its name. We came to Taunggyi and then Yaungwhe and saw our lake before us like hammered silver in the monsoon rains.

During the many days we spent in this pleasant place we were entertained lavishly by the Sawbwa and his young wife. A Sawbwa (literally, Lord of Heaven) is the omnipotent ruler of a Shan state. When we entered his Haw, his palace, we stepped backwards in time to the days of Marco Polo. A huge structure it was, with many pavilions, curving balconies, terraces overlooking the lake or the blue mountains behind. At one side was the private shrine of the Sawbwa's family where they worshipped their great gilt Buddha. On the other was a tiny house on stilts, a *nat*-house such as we had seen among the primitive hill tribes.

Our Sawbwa laughed. "I don't believe in *nats*, of course, but I don't disbelieve in them either, and so I put offerings there every day, just in case."

He introduced us to his wife. Lady Golden Nest her name meant in translation. His was Lord Silver. Little Tiger, their son, was playing on the floor with Emerald Moon, his half-sister.

Time in the Haw was not marked by the common minutes

and hours of a clock. At three-hour intervals a group of musicians somewhere in the depths of the palace played soft Burmese songs, night and day, to indicate what time it was.

It was Lady Golden Nest who competently and charmingly arranged for us to visit the Saya Maung. We lost our hearts to this fair princess of the peach-bloom skin and the almond eyes. Her English was nearly as good as our own, a little quaint and old-fashioned, perhaps, but perfectly adapted to the fairy stories with which, at our insistence, she delighted us during the long trips to and from the lake.

We sat comfortably among red velvet cushions in her private gondola, while the boatmen, the first leg-rowers we saw, propelled us silently down the canal that ran from the Haw to the monastery on the edge of the lake. These men were Inthas, we learned, a curious race reputedly enslaved long ago from the Arakan Islands in the Bay of Bengal. They were forced to fish for the lazy Shans. Balancing on one foot on the slippery edge of the canoe, the Intha grasps his paddle with one hand at shoulder height and with the opposite foot drives the blade backwards through the water—an incredible, ludicrous performance, we thought at first, but the paddlers make excellent time and are accustomed to trading voyages of a hundred and more miles in length up and down the rivers leading from the lake.

The canoes we passed in the canal were little ones, usually paddled by one man at the stern while his wife, if the wind was right, helped at the bow with a paper parasol in lieu of a sail. Little girls paddled kneeling in their toy boats when they passed us, but when they were some distance away they leg-rowed almost as smartly as their fathers.

"It is quite true," said our Lady Golden Nest, "that Saya Maung is a great tattooer. He's eccentric, but I think he will receive you. The boatmen will explain that you are friends of mine."

At the edge of the lake, three immense canoes were waiting for us, two of them paddled by ninety men apiece and the third by seventy, all clamouring for our custom.

"I'll have to leave you here," said Lady Golden Nest. "I'd advise each of you to take a canoe. There will be less chance of an upset than if you were all together. There will be a curry waiting for you whenever you return."

Gingerly we took our places in those precarious boats, Armand and Leila in the bigger ones, I in the smaller, Roy, Quentin, Jack, and Thunderface, with the cameras in a small motor boat, so that Roy might film our journey.

We followed the shore for half a mile or so, past floating, marshy islands with small shacks and gardens upon them. They actually floated and so could be towed from one part of the lake to another. Then we headed for the open lake. The paddlers quickened their strokes and shouted defiantly back and forth. It became a race. Armand cheered lustily and Leila, in the lead, tried at the same time to wave her hat and keep aboard. Whooping and thundering with the uproar of the drums we carried to mark the stroke, our boatmen kicked down their paddles in amazing unison. They shouted like fiends. Like centipedes or like Roxy's Rockettes the three boats scrambled on two hundred and fifty legs across the water. My men were losing, and as they doubled their efforts the bow of the boat went under and suddenly a fat spear of water came plunging along the deck, smashed into me and somersaulted me into the lake beneath the capsized canoe and my seventy paddlers.

I came up spluttering to see Roy howling with laughter as he cranked the Akeley towards me. "Wonderful! Wonderful!" he yelled. I struck out bravely, as all good movie actors do, ignoring him, remembering not to look at his callous camera, thinking of the light meter which lay soaked in one pocket and the jaunty feather from the tail of our Princess's parrot that had disappeared from what once had been my hat.

When the boat was righted we continued more circumspectly. The drums beat slower, the gong syncopating with them. The paddlers, without losing a stroke, laughed and gossiped. Though we had been travelling for over an hour by now they did not change sides, as I would have expected, to rest the legs that balanced them upon the two-inch gunwale,

for they were apparently right-leg-rowers and left-leg-rowers and could work only in their accustomed place. They were easily distinguishable by the uneven development of their calves.

There was not a man without a great display of tattooing across his back, mostly of the crossword puzzle variety called *in*, but here and there was one with a troupe of the dancing *nats*, which seemed actually to dance as the muscles rippled beneath them. The men who wore them, I noticed, were very much alike; they had more spirit than their fellows and all resembled that gay old chap we had met with his buffalo. The youngest of them, who had four *nats* only, kept laughing and beating his chest with his spare hand, and seemed to be trying to tell me something.

I understood at last. If the sahib—that was I—would pay for the operation, the boy would ask Saya Maung to tattoo another *nat* upon him, so that the generous sahib could see how it was done.

Just before the evening rains caught up with us we rounded a cape and saw a strange little island, about forty feet across. It was swampy and seemed to be held together by a haphazard system of bamboo poles which were poked horizontally into it like knitting needles. In the centre was a thatched hut, high at the ridgepole and low at the eaves, waving whiskers of thatch fronds in the wind, like a hut in a fairy tale. We waded through a garden of lotuses and entered the sacrosanct abode of the Saya Maung.

There was nothing definitely remarkable about him except his age, which might have been Biblical, and the absence of tattooing on his own skin. He had indeed a manner of worldliness which was disconcerting in one who could not have met more than half a dozen white men in all his life. He looked us each in the eye as he brewed Shan tea, a pale green potion into which he stirred a fingernail-load of salt per cup, then he passed it graciously around. My paddler sat with us, uneasy now in the presence of the magical man.

As we had sent Thunderface and Quentin back with the film in the motor boat, we had to strain our five vocabularies

to understand him, though he talked simply in bazaar Burmese.

He was very cordial, and in no hurry at all. We must sit down and be comfortable, he protested to Armand who was simultaneously protesting that we must soon leave before the storm became too severe, for there was no shelter in the canoes. Ah, unthinkable! There was the dye to be prepared, the style to be sharpened . . . We sat back, resigned, in the murky hut with the smoke of a petrol tin stove smarting our eyes.

It was a delicate operation, he said, an art far superior to that of mere painting or carving in wood. One must be physician as well as artist in magic, he said modestly, for there is the administration of the drug to be first considered, then the care of the wounds which are easily inflamed, causing fever, then the constant surveillance of the patient when the itching becomes almost intolerable and any scratching will not only produce a nasty sore but distort the tattooed figure and therefore weaken the power of the charm.

The rain whipped down so hard now that I thought it would split the fronds of which the hut was built, and we could hear the "ponk" of the canoes as they were swung against each other. The men were laughing.

My young paddler sat absolutely still, in a sort of trance. The *saya* moved close to him and showed him an ancient book of hand-made Shan paper, a sample book, obviously, for its rough pages were illustrated with drawings of every conceivable sort of *nat*: dancing *nats*, amorous *nats*, *nats* with spears jutting from their eyes. The youth pointed to one of these latter and indicated a space for it in the ballet on his chest.

Deftly the *saya* drew the outline with a Chinese brush. "You are ready, son?" He was ready. The *saya* put beside him a lacquerware pot of the glistening black tar-like substance that was opium, and passed him the pipe, the flame, and the needle. The boy was soon drugged and reclining easily across the extended leg of the *saya*, his head propped against the wall. A small gecko lizard, upside-down above him, stared with its jewelled eyes into his dim ones.

Roy and Armand moved closer, whispering about the light, the composition of the scene, for they might film it to-morrow,

but the old man waved them away. Carefully he mixed sesamum oil lampblack with a little water and sharpened the nibs of his wooden style. This was made of the male or solid bamboo and split into pointed quarters so that the ink would be retained between them. The *saya* fitted this four-inch style into a female bamboo about a foot and a half long, cut off three inches below its bottom joint to allow the style to slide only that distance into it. Its top end was weighted with a brass figure of a duck such as the natives use to balance their scales.

For a long while the *saya* sat nearly motionless, touching gently the *nats* already tattooed on the brown chest across his thigh. He put his fingers together occasionally as though in prayer. The smoke of the brazier filled the room, dense and pungent, and with the fumes of the opium I began to feel sick. It must obviously be my imagination, but it seemed that the floor of the house was lifting and falling, pushing me a little off balance, as if I were on a boat. Leila was swallowing hard.

At last the *saya* began his operation, taking the bamboo tube between forefinger and thumb of his right hand, dipping it in the ink, placing the style points upon the figure he had drawn and cracking it down sharply with the palm of his left hand. The style, like the gold-tamping instrument which dentists use, snapped back into its tube and was checked by the joint. The boy groaned, and so did I, for I could see the deep puncture from where I sat, several feet away. The next puncture was less than a sixteenth of an inch from the first, and the boy groaned again as the style bit into him. There would be hundreds of these punctures necessary to make up that tiny design.

We sat for what seemed hours drinking salted tea to assuage our queasy stomachs, while the sweet smoke twisted around us, the boy groaned regularly and the storm lashed at our fragile roof. There was no escape for us now, in weather like this. The *saya* never looked at us. Round and round the figure he worked, with the boy groaning an immediate echo to the dull smack of the style. No one spoke. We all felt too ill, and each of us was wondering if his reason had been

affected by this dream-like scene, for each of us felt that the floor was heaving beneath him.

Then through the storm came a sudden cry, a banshee's wail that sent the shivers up my spine. The *saya* went on working. Again the wail went up and following it came a jar that shook the hut and brought me staggering to my feet. The *saya* nodded absently and pointed with his bamboo to the closed door. We didn't need the suggestion. Armand and I jumped through it and stood incredulous before the hut.

There were the three canoes ahead, lashed by their sterns to our island. There on the shore ten feet away was the ramshackle monastery from which we had set out that afternoon. And there stood our genial Sawbwa of Yaungwhe

I understood at last the heaving of the floor and the uneasy sensations we had experienced within the hut. While we had been attentive to the tattooing, deafened by the storm, the three giant canoes had quietly towed our island across the lake, just as the garden islands had always been towed to leeward of the seasonal winds.

We stepped ashore in rain and the air was clean to our clogged lungs. The paddlers turned. The island and its hut slid off into the lake again, bearing its magic to leeward of us and far away.

### CHAPTER III

## MONKS AND ELEPHANTS

IT was hard to leave Yaungwhe, our hospitable Sawbwa and the Lady Golden Nest, but if we were to look for the Hill of the Snake and reach China before the worst of the monsoon we had to be on our way. We said good-bye over many cups of salted tea, and when the Sawbwa was occupied with the salt shaker that wouldn't shake, our Princess quickly reached behind her and jerked a feather from the parrot's tail. "Yawp!" said the parrot. A breeze blew through the verandah and whisked the feather from the Princess's hand. Roy and I both clutched at it but the breeze lifted it away from us and carried it up and up above the shrine where the *nats* were unquestionably laughing.

"Good-bye. Good-bye."

The first tributary of the Salween River led out of Lake Inle, but it seemed unlikely to be the one we sought according to Thunderface, so we drove north-east to the second and the third, following cart tracks which each morning looked untraversable when we had decided that they really were tracks and not just spaces between the trees. Here was untouched jungle, unvisited by white men simply because there was no reason for them to come here. But gradually we were encouraged in our quest; we must be nearing our immediate goal, the valley of Kya Lap Sing, we felt one night as we sat at our tent entrances listening to the shrieking insects of the wood. For more and more frequently we had seen the cylindrical cloth streamers waving from bamboo poles above the jungle villages, the emblems of Naga, the fertility god. When we had asked of Kensi, no one had answered us at all. Kya Lap Sing they would admit to, vaguely, but at the mention of Kensi they walked away.

In the morning we could see mountains downstream but

no roads leading in that direction and, more because the land was dramatic and the people wild than because we expected immediately to find either Kensi or Kya Lap Sing, we had our men build rafts and drifted down the river. Very often it was choked with vines which we had to slash through with *dahs*. Rhesus monkeys leaned down to look at us. The hot air was meshed with dragonflies. We had a breakfast of rice and mangoes on board, moving constantly in a vain attempt to outdistance the mosquitoes.

Gradually the river narrowed and the walls of mossy rocks rose higher on each side of us, straighter as well for their tops were drawing together and even a hundred feet above our heads the creepers were now linking wall and wall. It was a cavernous place, unlighted by the sun which still was below its zenith.

Thunderface took his cheroot from his mouth and remarked through the mosquitoes, "Looks like Kya Lap Sing, from what I hear. The old guy at Pagan said the monks never come to this temple until just about noon, which is the only time the sun shines in. The snakes go away then, he said."

Go away? There was something wrong then. We were looking for Naga worship with the snakes always present as the legend described. I wondered if the priest at Pagan had side-tracked us purposely.

I called to Leila and Armand on the first raft, but we rounded a bend at that moment and saw before us the temple.

It stood tall upon the shore to our left, built of some dark basalt, I guessed, spiring into the deeper shadow where the cliff jutted over it. It was a simple but awesome Buddhist edifice, not Hindu in any way, as it should have been if the Naga were worshipped there. The cliff backed it, and on the other three sides were rows of countless small pagodas erected to indicate to Buddha the devotion of their builders. Plaques of green glazed sandstone—the art of this has long been lost—ornamented its base and the lintel of the door which led to the sanctuary.

"It's close to noon," said Thunderface. "Maybe those monks won't like us being here. They'll be coming soon."

Roy swung his camera cases ashore. "That's fine. We'll film them. I like monks." Armand had gone ahead, already framing the scene with his fingers.

We met the first snake with our first step upon the flagstone court of the temple, a Russell's viper, thick and short and more vicious in appearance than even the cobra. We met two others within the holy crypt, and as we approached the sitting Buddha, a fine alabaster piece of the Talaing period, a viper slithered from its lap and crawled behind it.

"No cobras," said Armand disgustedly. "This isn't anything like the place, but let's get a shot of the approach to it anyway."

We had turned to leave when a disc of golden light a yard in diameter slipped towards us across the floor, came to rest on my shoes, slipped out of the door again. My heart missed a beat. Roy's eyes were popping as we rushed to the door. For a hundred feet up and down the dark river the water was dappled with these ghostly lights. They travelled along the shore and crawled over us. They slid down the cliff behind us, across the temple, and gradually converged until we were standing in a pool of light.

We shielded our eyes, and when we looked to the top of the opposite cliff we were nearly blinded by what seemed at first a hundred suns blazing directly down at us.

"Mirrors!" Armand exclaimed.

"Monks!" said Thunderface.

We fell back under the branches of a great tree, where the light could not reach us, and saw then that the cliff was covered with monks whose orange robes flared like flames in the sun, and each was holding what must have been a mirror in his hand, an ingenious means to examine their snake-infested temple when the sun did not reach it. They could see the Buddha thus, and perform their devotions, as we later learned, without descending to the river's pit. They could watch for the Hindu fanatics who were continually troubling them. Or for moving picture men. The mirrors were apparently those which we had noticed most Burmese carrying for use while plucking the few hairs which grew on their chins.

But we didn't think of this then, for the monks were shouting wildly at us. I remembered with shame that we had neglected to remove our shoes when we entered the temple, as if trespassing on holy ground were not affront enough. Englishmen had been assaulted for less than this, and it seemed wise for us to clear out fast.

As we turned in that multiple spotlight and rushed to the rafts, we saw several of the monks hurrying down a steep path towards us.

"For heaven's sake, Thunderface!" Armand shouted.

Thunderface stood placidly watching the little old monk who was far in the lead. "I'll wait. I want to talk to him."

"Come back here and don't be a fool!" I yelled. The monk seemed intent on murder. Thunderface waved us away and we poled to the middle of the stream, watching our Indian anxiously. The monk raced like a gnat straight for that proud bronze figure, but Thunderface caught him by the robe and nearly unfrocked him as he dragged him howling to a thorny thicket beside the river. There was silence for a moment. The monks on the cliff stood motionless, menacing. Then the cries broke forth again. Then silence.

"Now we've got a murder on our hands," said Leila.

At a call from the bank we turned to see Thunderface striding casually towards us. He spat into the water, rinsed his hands and climbed aboard.

"He's O.K.," he said. "He told me where Kensi is, sort of. I gave him ten rupees for his church."

He would explain no more than that, but it was a very muddy monk we saw slinking into the temple as we poled upstream from the Valley of Night.

We smiled at the dear old Dodges when we came back to them. The seats were soft in comparison with the bamboo rafts. The radios brought us civilized news calmly delivered from a world of comfort we had nearly forgotten. Gently we brushed the curious natives from our running boards and started on. For the next three days we drove through rain. We came to the great Salween River which rises in the Tibetan plateau and rushes south for nearly two thousand miles to

the Gulf of Martaban. As the current is so fierce at Takaw, where we crossed, the raft ferry is attached by rope and pulley to a cable sixty feet above the water. By setting the rudder of the raft so that the bow is turned away from the cable towards the farther shore the boat is propelled across by the current, without effort by the boatmen.

It seemed that wherever we went now we were encountering Buddhist monks, the *pongyis*, like ghosts to remind us of Kya Lap Sing. Early each morning we would see them on their begging tour of the villages. First would come two young novices beating a gong slung from a bamboo pole between them, and behind them, in their yellow robes, the begging-bowls in their hands, serene and apparently humble, would follow the monks. The brown housewives would rush from their huts to meet them and offer rice or curry or fruit, no matter how small the amount, for it is a fine thing to give alms to these meditative men. It is never acknowledged. The cover of the bowl is lifted, the food deposited and without a glance of gratitude the monk moves on. The next follows him, and the next and the next, each receiving only a spoonful from each house perhaps, until the day's meals for all the monastery are assured. Always they must beg their food, for this is part of the self-discipline which they believe conducive to humility.

It is a strange employment, this of the monasteries. A man may enter whenever he feels the need for his soul. He may leave when he chooses, and when he has had enough of worldliness he may become a monk again. Supposedly the monks must refrain from sin in any form, the worst of all being the murder of life, but although they will carefully pick the vermin from their clothes and lay the innocent creatures aside with gentleness, the official *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States* has shown that nearly every serious uprising against the British Government has been concocted in some monastery, and that the leaders of dacoit or robber bands are not infrequently these same Buddhist monks. We were amazed at the number of counterfeit silver rupees which came into our hands; they were, the court records showed,

for the most part minted in the monasteries. But there is, on the other hand, unquestionable good done by them. In many parts of Burma they are the only teachers the people have; their knowledge is scant, but they alone are responsible for the amazing literacy of the land.

We drove east through the Shan States, seeking the district where we should find Kensi and the Hill of the Snake according to the information which Thunderface extracted from the muddy monk. A dozen times as we sat eating supper under a tarpaulin that thundered with the pounding of the rain, we decided that if the road were as bad to-morrow as it was to-day, we would turn back. We had already lost too much time on this vague quest. But although the road grew worse we still kept on. Small, rugged mountains barred our path, but somehow we got over them, averaging twenty miles a day at best, ploughing through and skidding out of ruts, laying teak planks over the deeper runnels and placing them like a wall at corners where the cars might slip from a precipice. We drove south, at Thunderface's behest, towards Siam.

We had spent a week wandering in the jungle and were definitely ready to give the whole thing up when the storm gods of those parts took the matter out of our hands. We were confused one evening by the continual forking of the flooded bullock-cart track, but we kept on blindly in the hope of finding shelter. The jungle was so dense here and the deluge so severe that it seemed impossible to erect the tents. We knew we were low on petrol, but it was only when Jack's truck, the last car in line, ran completely out of it that Armand decided we had better stop and sleep in the cars.

We slept in them for five nights, until I began to feel I would be permanently crooked. Every day we made tentative journeys forward in Armand's car, but we found nothing ahead but a diminishing track. Even if we shared our petrol with the truck it would have been impossible to go back the way we came. We could not back out for miles along that narrow alley; we could not turn the truck because it was walled by a huge rock on one side and three large trees on the other. Nor could we get past it with the cars.

"There's only one thing possible that we can do," said Armand glumly. "Simply wait for decent weather and walk in one direction or the other for help. It would be foolhardy trying to hike it now."

Fortunately we had plenty of food with us. Our time was not entirely lost as we employed it in recording on film the jungle sounds around us: the cries of weird birds—there were many peacocks—usually invisible above the matted canopy of leaves; the cough of leopards; the shrill, metallic clamour of the cicadas that nearly deafened us; the chatter of monkeys; and occasionally the scream of a distant elephant.

On the fifth night, a dry one at last, we had pitched our tents in the path and turned in early with the intention of trying to escape on foot next morning from that malarial jungle that imprisoned us. Jack already had a touch of fever, and in his usual hearty way was eating so much quinine that we could almost hear the ringing in his ears.

At about two in the morning we were all wakened suddenly by the trumpeting of elephants near by, a chilling sound to those who hear it for the first time, high-pitched, agonized, like the whinnying of a herd of horses. We stumbled from the tents, straining our eyes into the darkness. When the trumpeting sounded again it was quite close to us, but we could hear no movement of the animals among the trees.

"Better get into the cars," said Armand. "Put up the windows and keep low."

We were no sooner in than we saw two massive bull elephants bearing down from one side of us and a female from the other. They looked like the Himalayas to me.

Thunderface, always eager to be helpful, turned on a flashlight. Armand slapped it from his hand, but in that instant of light he had seen hope for us.

"Did you see it?" he whispered excitedly. "That female's shrunken ankle where a chain has been around it. That's a work elephant! She has probably broken loose from some teak estate near by to meet these two wild bulls. If we can follow her, we'll find a way out of here."

"Sure," said Thunderface weakly. "Sure."

Some of us had lived with elephants in Africa during the filming of "Dark Rapture," but we had never been this close to them during the rutting season. We were too close altogether. By the thin moonlight filtering through the leaves we saw the nearer bull suddenly lunge at the rear of the lorry which blocked his way. We took a grip on things. If they got our scent they would crush the cars like Christmas tree bangles, despite those fine Budd bodies. Never, I thought, had my breath tasted so bad.

But the female had passed the cars now and had stopped some distance off. The males turned their attention upon each other, rushing together with lifted trunks, colliding resoundingly. Up flashed a tusk in the moonlight, but it missed its mark; the other elephant got a trunk-hold on it and nearly wrenches the head from his attacker. It was terrifying to watch that titanic battle. We sat paralysed until one beast was worsted, though he was apparently unhurt, and went lumbering off. The triumphant male and the female started slowly in the opposite direction.

"Fine. Come on," said Armand.

"What?"

"We're following them. They won't bother us. They're in love."

We hurriedly put on our boots and damp clothes. We crawled through the forest to a little clearing, and there witnessed a colossal love-making that few white men have ever seen. The animals jostled each other and buffeted each other's heads like gigantic lamps. They seemed to blow screaming kisses through their trunks and nuzzle each other clumsily. Love on such a physical scale is indescribable.

The male finally plodded away, with a swagger, I thought, and the female haughtily turned tail and started back by the way she had come.

"Here's our chance," said Armand. "Are we all going?"

We were. We were all too excited to sit in that steamy camp until morning. The elephant was not hard to follow, for the path she had trampled was a broad one, but we pursued that siren for at least ten miles before daylight showed us the

welcome sight of a logging camp and a cheerful young Scotsman who introduced himself as Eric Gongue.

"So you've brought April!" he remarked, and he explained that April was his favourite elephant's name. When he had soundly berated her and anchored her amidst exclusively female companions he led us to his bungalow to meet the charming Mrs. Gongue. Their year-old baby was teething on a circlet of elephant tusk.

Within ten minutes we were offered bullocks, petrol, refrigerated beer and the courage to keep on to Kensi.

"Kensi?" asked Gongue, as we reposed our dirty bodies on his clean bamboo verandah. "I believe that's the old name of a village about a day's march from here. It's called Kawmayo now. I suppose that's the place you're after, though I haven't been there and can't say whether they worship snakes or not. Shouldn't wonder though. They're crazy enough. Live on opium and *bhang*, I hear."

"Can we get through by car?"

"Impossible. It's a wonder you've managed to come this far. Take my elephants, and the mahouts will guide you. A few of them go there occasionally to buy their *bhang*."

So hospitable were these good folk, these "jungle wallahs," that they turned over their whole camp to us when they learned we were interested in making a brief elephant sequence for the film. We ate and slept and worked with the elephants for the next week, marvelling anew at their intelligence and extraordinary strength. The Shan mahouts began training them at the age of four, before they were yet independent of their mothers and the solicitous old "aunties" who attach themselves to the family as soon as a baby is born. When mature the elephants do their work with only the most casual hints from their mahouts (who, incidentally, have no love for them at all), clearing the jungle, piling teak, rolling the logs into the river. Large as they are, their power is astonishing. We filmed one old fellow dragging a log which Gongue judged to weigh four tons. Strong too are their passions: this was not the first time that the romantic April had broken away; she had once marched twenty-six miles for love's sake,

with her chain wound carefully around her foot so that it would not tangle among the trees. Another elephant, a bull, got into a brawl over April while we were in camp and received a terrific tusk wound in the shoulder. This the mahouts strangely tended by stuffing into it the chopped meat of twenty chickens plus a great amount of garlic and some iodoform.

Anthrax had until recently been common on all the teak estates, but *surrat*, a form of pernicious anæmia, was the greater problem now. Gongue cured it dramatically by feeding his sick elephants huge quantities of arsenic wrapped in hay. His care of them was touching. Even the healthy animals were given a long vacation from February till June and another in October. They were bathed regularly, pampered with imported hay and coddled like children. They obviously adored this young man who was absolute master over miles of jungle, as did also the mahouts perhaps because for the first time they had a boss who fully trusted them. He had not been there long before he was told that whenever the logging operations moved to a new area of the estate the *nats* must be propitiated by the offer of one small bottle of rum, one cigarette, and one completely black rooster for every elephant on the job. Gongue took their word for it and made the offerings, without ever checking up on the *nats'* appetites. Sure enough, those offerings proved an effective prophylactic against trouble in the camp.

#### CHAPTER IV

### THE HILL OF THE SNAKE

REGRETFULLY, we had to leave at last. We rocked away on elephant-back through the forest of teak, the broad leaves of it curtaining the sun. Here lived many *nats*, as attested by the numerous crude little huts, well stocked with rice and fruit, under the larger trees. There would be miniature fences around them, their palings fortified with black cock feathers. We climbed gradually; the teak was replaced by pine; north of us rose a jungly mountain to about six thousand feet, and west, where the three countries joined, squatted a number of lesser hills, their jungles folded about them like the cloaks of trolls sleeping with their heads on their knees.

Armand in the lead suddenly flung up his arms. "There it is! Gongue is right! That's Kensi sure! That's Hurston's black mountain! Look at it!"

A great cloud was travelling above the hills to the west, and when it had passed we saw a black pyramid of a mountain which seemed to correspond exactly with the one Hurston had described. The village at its foot was almost indistinguishable, but over it streamed the long cloth snakes, the emblem of the Naga and the token of our goal.

We went down that hill like an avalanche, and only slowed when we heard a terrific din coming from the village. Drums and flutes and weird stringed instruments were playing all together to accompany a moaning melody which seemed to be made by human lungs.

We entered the village slowly, with the dignity befitting white men. The musicians didn't pause; they scarcely looked at us. Some had kidney-shaped violins, some had the usual narrow drums with clay daubed on the heads to raise the tone, and some were playing floppy flutes which seemed to

be jointed in several places. The half-naked village men, their long hair twisted into topknots, had eyes only for the procession of musicians that was winding through the single muddy street, and the women, wearing embroidered red skirts similar to the Kentung kilts, sat before their huts and moaned. It was obvious that they were half-drugged. Only a few of the younger men, who looked less entranced than their elders, reached for pellet bows, and watched us suspiciously.

"Don't stop," Armand advised us; "follow the procession slowly." But my mahout waited to point through the open door of the hut beside me.

"*Bhang!*" he said. He spoke for a moment to one of the older men, who fairly shouted his reply, a long complaint accompanied by gestures, then hurried on to reach Thunderface so that I might have it interpreted.

"Great fortune!" said Thunderface. "Not one son has been born in this village for over a year, and they are going to try to get their sacred serpent to fix it up."

"Great fortune indeed," said Armand. "Will they mind us watching?"

"We can try," said Thunderface.

When we caught up with twelve musicians we noticed that a woman was now leading them.

"Hsa-pu," said my mahout—her name, I supposed.

Riding beside her, and staring fascinated at her, I had forgotten the sacred hill ahead, and it was not until she left her musicians and started off alone that I looked up. It was Hurston's hill and no mistake. Before us was the serpentine stairway, a foot wide, winding into the clouds, and slowly along it climbed Hsa-pu, followed by a youth who bore a roll of mats and a tray with offerings of coconut and fruit and rice.

We knelt our elephants and got down. Hsa-pu was far ahead by now and we followed hurriedly in single file. Each step of the stair was shaped like a scale of the Naga, crudely cut of flagstone, and where the rain had settled upon it and thin moss grown it was slimy as a serpent's skin. I turned to look at the musicians who still were playing, and the villagers

with their pellet bows held indecisively, but they made no move to stop us. We climbed for half a mile, slippery step by step, until we reached the lowering mists.

The stairs levelled here and seemed to go directly into the solid earth. We had expected to find some sort of temple at the top, but the grassy court where we stood, watching Hsa-pu, led to a low precipice which was honeycombed with small caves. Thunderface was at my side and the mahout beside him, explaining as best he could this extraordinary ritual.

There was just light enough to see, far in the depths of the largest cave, a low cot woven of vines, and flower garlands suspended from pegs above it. Hsa-pu went in slowly, followed by her servant, and in a moment he came backing out, looking neither to right nor left but abjectly laying the mats straight before him. The mahout was whispering. Hsa-pu had gone to propitiate her god, Hsa-pu whose ancestors for centuries had exclusively had the knowledge of the snake and the secret of placating him. And Hsa-pu it must be of this generation to discuss with the god all matters of fertility, whether of crops or beasts or women. This year no sons had been born to Kensi, and so Hsa-pu had come to intercede with the snake god.

We could dimly see her raise the tray of offerings to the height of her eyes, scoop a fistful of rice, blow upon it and flick it in all directions, to appease the other gods, I assumed. Then she put the tray upon the cot and knelt beside it.

It was nearly dark by now; the sun beyond the mist was sinking and the orange light that reached the cave was whitened suddenly with a flare of lightning. We could hear the music far below, muffled by mist, and from the cave came strange noises, alternately sibilant and explosive. Hsa-pu was squatting, backing towards us, talking to the snake that lived within, drawing him out along the mats.

We too backed off and stood breathless before the creature we saw.

This was the King Cobra, or Hamadryad, at least fourteen feet in length, as large, I believe, as they ever grow. His



Magical tattooing



Hsa-Pu kisses her god

hooded head arched four feet above the ground, on a level with Hsa-pu's breast as he wove after her.

"My God!" said Armand, who cherishes snakes. "Do you suppose it has its fangs?"

The mahout was whispering hoarsely to Thunderface who passed on the message to me. These snakes, he said ("serpents," he corrected himself), were caught in the jungle and brought once a year to the sacred mountain, where Hsa-pu made a pact with them, promising to return them within twelve months to their homes. She would be bitten, she knew, if she broke faith. The snakes were then content to remain within the cave, where she fed them with frogs once every five days and besought their boon when the need arose. The fangs and the venom were untampered with—you can't pull the teeth of your dog—and since the King Cobra, because of his enormous secretions, carries over a hundred times the lethal dose of venom, we realized that we were witnessing perhaps the most dangerous religious ritual in the world.

Now the woman and the snake were upon the mat before the cave, Hsa-pu squatting, approaching and backing with quick smooth movements of her heels, drawing the attention of the god with her left hand and striking it lightly with her right, as a boxer might do. Now she rose to a crouch and curved one arm over it, farther and farther back until the snake rose erect as far as it could reach and she could gently bring down her hand upon its head, forcing it flat upon the ground. She would humble it thus, remind it of her power, before she wheedled it for the village sons.

The snake, the god, sprang back hissing when she released it. Hsa-pu backed round in a circle now, and the huge snake pursued her. With forefinger pressed to thumb of her left hand she seemed to draw it towards her, as if by a thread, while with her right hand she made curious lithe gestures.

The music from below grew gradually faster and Hsa-pu's movements quickened with it. Rain was falling now, and the great snake glistened as he tried to get close enough to strike. She bent forward, protruded one knee, and when the

snake flung towards her, hurtling half its body from the ground, she received its fangs in her taut skirt.

Then she lowered her head almost to the ground and looked sidewise at her god; and he rose and remained motionless above her, hood expanded while she talked to him gently.

Then with almost imperceptible motion her head was rising. Her hands behind her, she leaned slowly down and pressed her mouth against the poisonous mouth of her great god. For a moment she remained in this posture, while we held our breaths as we watched. Then the snake swung his head to one side and moved off into the cave, leaving Hsa-pu kneeling, her forehead in her hands unharmed.

We spent seventeen days at Kensi, waiting for the weather to clear sufficiently for us to film Hsa-pu and her amazing ritual. She was perfectly willing. Although the great duty of her life was towards her own village and the Naga, the serpent god, she had several times travelled to the west and south of Burma, "charming" common cobras at the five-day markets and drawing the snakes from the estates of white men, an inexplicable feat performed by no one else in Burma though it is quite matter-of-course in India proper.

She felt, it could do no harm to implore the god's favours once again on behalf of the sonless village women, particularly when for her pains she would receive some very natty apparel which Leila had outworn. We were interested in the problem of why a village of seventy people should have had no sons born in it for over a year.

It was a curse, we were told by one old woman, a curse of the *nats* because one of their favourite trees had been carelessly burned. She was certain, however, that the Naga could remove this curse.

The rain at last abated sufficiently for us to film Hsa-pu's strange ritual. We worked feverishly, Roy and Armand with the two big moving picture cameras and the sound recorder, I with the Leicas and Ikontas.

We were a considerably shaken expedition after making the close-ups of that fourteen-foot King Cobra's venomous head.

We made tests in the evening, as we did for every scene, developing about eight inches of the exposed film in a Leica tank. It was good, said Roy; focus, exposure, composition. The piece of film we developed showed Hsa-pu's head and the snake's almost filling the frame with that kiss.

We were jubilant. This was rare material, and we took it as an augury of better things along the Burma-Yunnan Highway which we should now follow into China.

Thunderface left us in Kensi, for he had his own village to attend to, said he, and the quicksands to guard. We watched him regretfully, as he turned from us, that lost redskin, high aboard an elephant in the Burma jungles.

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## CHAPTER V

### THE BITTER BURMA ROAD

CHINA was our destination now, and Lashio ahead was the terminal town of the great Burma-Yunnan Highway which we should travel, a highway unsurpassed as a feat of hasty engineering. When Japan blocked the ports of China there remained only three possible routes for the transportation of munitions to Chungking: by rail and road through French Indo-China; by the old silk road from Russia; and along the tribute route of Marco Polo's time from Burma. This last was the most practicable, for it connected with Rangoon by rail, over British territory, and offered least chance of interference by the Japanese.

One hundred and sixty thousand coolies were conscripted from the fields to dig this highway, for the most part with their bare hands, home-made chisels and bamboo scoops the size of dustpans, slaving under appalling conditions of health in malarial country that is mountainous and almost impenetrably jungled. But the road was somehow made, and eight thousand trucks were roaring along it to Chungking before the break of the torrential monsoon.

New Lashio was alive. It was here that Armand and Quentin and I went to look for a cook among the ill-lit eating dens and the ferocious small soldiery. A male cook we wanted, someone handy with a cleaver, but even Quentin could not make them understand. We sat drinking Shan tea with salt in it while emissaries went forth into China to our right and Burma to our left. A dapper half-caste with a little goatee that had a circle of birds tattooed around it leaned suddenly across his table and whispered: "You like nice Shan wife, please, can cook?"

"What we want is a male cook, a man, really. Something like you," Armand said with a grimace.

"Me? Me? I come!" said the little fellow. "You rent me forty rupees a month, yes? I come fine!" And he darted to the kitchen where we could hear a great clatter of pots and pans being assembled.

We took him, more from desperation than confidence, for we were eager to start for China. His name was Yang-Hou-hsiao, Yang-the-Little-Wart.

"If he can't cook, we can send him back from the border," Quentin grumbled.

But his first meal was a triumph, though it had only one course to it. We had left Lashio and had the trial dinner at the edge of a precipice. The river wound through vines five hundred feet below, and five hundred feet straight up over our heads the mountain still ascended to the heights where, said the cook, the bandits lived. But his superb cabbage soup took our minds from them; we lived on cabbage soup thereafter, for it was all our cook could cook.

Through Musé and Manwhé it rained continually, yet there was no water but the rain to drink, for the streams were infected and the one strong river was far below. Good as they were, the cars boiled going over those precipitous passes. We came to Wan Ting, the customs station, in the late afternoon, and while we argued interminably over passports and our right to purchase petrol, the great caravans for the north passed us by: the bullock caravans, and the buffaloes, and the long mule trains. We wanted to film these but the driver of the mules would not at first allow it, for his animals would be dead on the film, he explained, and so afflict the live ones. "Listen, these are *moving pictures*," Quentin assured him, and after a while the Black Yunnanese consented to one quick shot.

The bamboo barrier was lifted and we entered China. We had tea, at China's expense, while Armand was forced to accept the services of two of the dreaded Black Guard of China, "to protect you from bandits," they said, but actually to prevent photographs of the Burma-Yunnan road. They were dressed in black, with black spiked helmets and great automatic pistols that made the little fellows limp. I doubt

that they could lift them to their shoulders, but they were useful as a threat to bandits. The customs station had been attacked and razed three times during the last eight months, not by professional dacoits but by natives from both sides of the border who were hungry and ill.

We drove on towards Chefang with sinking spirits. Petrol we had obtained, a miracle of Armand's diplomacy, but we were expressly forbidden to use the cameras despite the arrangements we had made in Washington with the Chinese Embassy. We who had hoped to make a film sympathetic to China now felt nothing but hostility on every side.

It was midnight when the twisted black of the jungle was broken by the geometric black of a sudden village. Our lights shone on another bamboo barrier across the road, and behind the bamboo were a dozen blue-jacketed military police, their guns and bayonets levelled at us. We showed our pass from Wan Ting and were permitted to enter.

We were herded through alleys and courtyards, through a litter of invisible pigs, to an abandoned temple where a lamp was burning. That night we slept together on a porch of the temple courtyard, beneath a green and scarlet mural dragon that threatened, like China itself, to swallow us usurpers into its coils. It was not cosy. We started awake at four the next morning when Armand's evil alarm clock, of Japanese origin, went chattering across the dark. There were a dozen cries in answer to it as a dozen soldiers sprang from their beds around us. The porch had been filled with them while we slept.

We saw instantly the danger of wakening Chinese troops with a Japanese gong, particularly these who were recruited from the most primitive coolies of Yunnan Province. Their souls had been travelling during the night and might have been caught outside their bodies by such a rude awakening. We passed the clock from hand to hand, still ringing like the bells of hell, until it was finally decided that the thing was harmless and all souls were accounted for.

Chefang was grim in the morning rain, a jumble of decrepit houses with curling eaves and roofs of tile. It was a village of the old and the cruel and evil, where no children played and

even the adolescent soldiers had the look of men to whom hate was the only emotion known. They gestured us on and leaving Chefang we followed a road that wound up to six thousand feet, with curves so abrupt that we sometimes wondered if we were not returning on the road we had climbed.

The mountains hid the sun by four o'clock, and in that twilight we struggled for a tyre-hold in the rutted mud, a sort of gumbo which seemed composed of mucilage and vaseline. It caked the wheels to the mudguards, yet it was impossible to drive straight through it. Again and again our rear wheels skidded to the edge of the cliff and we had either to be dragged back to the road by the lorry or to straighten our course with block and tackle attached to trees. We could not forget that we were now in the heart of the bandit country and that if we bogged down we could well expect trouble from the mountain men. We dug at the ruts with bare hands and cursed the coolies who should have cared for the road as they valued their country's life.

We must reach Mongshih. As Armand's car ahead looped round a corner and across my headlights I could see him, tense as a gargoyle, leaning half out the window to squint through the rain. Leila's wet hair was streaming from the other side. Quentin, soaked, sprawled across the roof. One slip here would find the expedition ended in the valley.

The road improved slightly as we approached Mongshih at last, and when we stopped at the file of straggled huts that was called a village Jack was again singing "Home on the Range" in his wild Irish bass. We had tea, with the information that since there were no inns here we would camp most safely in the Chinese cemetery, because the bandits, maybe, would be afraid of ghosts.

This was the Valley of the Shadow of Death, a rotting land beneath the rains. The graveyard with its paunchy little tombs seemed cheery in comparison to the view that greeted us in the morning. Two hundred trucks squatted in the mud ahead of our cars; three hundred more were jammed behind, for between here and Lung Ling, we learned, there were two great landslides that the rain had gouged from the

mountains and spilled across the road, and the two bridges between them had just that night been sloughed away.

There was nothing for it but to wait day after day for three weeks, believing, but with diminishing hope, that China must soon repair this major artery. It rained. The valley began to flood, and soon we could no longer see the chequer-board boundaries of the rice-fields. They were sheets of water, gradually rising until two inches of rain lay stagnant on the floors of our tents.

We ate our cabbage soup, which still seemed to be the only dish our cook could cook, and waited gloomily each night for the return of whichever member of the expedition had spent the day at the first landslide. But his report scarcely varied. "Five male coolies, twenty-three women and a dozen kids pecking at it with little bamboo scoops. They don't even make a dent in it. They boiled plain water for lunch. Not even tea to put in it. Have we any of that awful rice wine left?"

We apportioned the wine carefully and read miserable fortunes in the dregs of the cabbage soup. We sweated over scenarios with an ear and an eye always cocked towards that sinister road.

Our single hope of escape was that the dynamite truck, the only one on this long section of road, would arrive with sufficient coolies to blast away the slides and repair the two bridges if they, like the rest, were not already bogged down in mud and opium. The drivers of the munitions trucks smoked opium openly, lying with their knees in air upon the seats of their cubicles.

Two American lads, Herbert and Richard, were the leaders of the convoy encamped with us, a pair of jaunty youngsters who called themselves the Foreign Legion of China.

They advised us to abandon our attempt to go any farther into China. "We may be stuck here for weeks," said Richard. "Since you're not taking film here anyway—and God knows there's nothing to take—I'd advise you to try to get back to Burma before the rains have washed out the road at that end too. All you wanted was to learn the condition of the road during the monsoon. You should be satisfied."

Armand agreed that we should be satisfied. We packed that night and crawled into sopping beds with the intention of rising before the sun.

Quentin and Jack in the tent next to us talked drowsily. Then their voices tapered into silence. Roy turned on his cot beside mine. The expedition went to sleep.

I spun awake through a dream to realize that the camp was a yowling bedlam. Armand was shouting through the yowls, "Dave! Roy! Jack!" Roy, was already on his feet and beyond him through the mosquito net flap I could see the silhouette of a man, legs wide apart, a gleaming *dah* swinging murderously in the rain-speckled beam of someone's flashlight. Two other black figures went hurtling past, Kachin bandits, all right, and not afraid of ghosts either. There was no sound from the truck where our Black Guard cowered.

I reached for my .38 and dropped it again. I might kill somebody. I slipped on the faithful brass knuckles that had seen me through a variety of troubles in the South Seas, but Roy pulled me back. He was calmly lighting one of the long magnesium flares we used for night photography. He began to wail as he zipped open the mosquito net. Then he bounded through it, howling like a banshee, and waving a blaze of light rushed straight for the three bedraggled bandits. We all yelled and converged behind him. There was no hesitation on the bandits' part. They tumbled over each other towards the flooded rice-fields. They went knee-deep into the ooze, lurching for a foothold. Leila flung a tin of baked beans after them and Roy flung the torch. We stood in the muck and laughed. The last laugh in China was ours.

## CHAPTER VI

### WE BREACH THE FORBIDDEN LAND

We were a grim group when we reached Rangoon. We said good-bye to Quentin and shipped him home. The weather was still against us. Burma was in the grip of the monsoon, which prevented further work. Assam, the wettest country in the world, the home of the wild Naga tribe, was deluged with record floods. Central India, almost wholly unknown, where the descendants of the ancient Dravidians—Gonds and Bhils—still flourish evilly, was a soaking morass.

The only other countries accessible in this season, and of photographic interest, were Tibet and Nepal.

"Tibet has been overdone," said Armand, "and you might as well forget Nepal. That place is really forbidden. In all history there have not been two hundred white men allowed into the country. The British went in a short way with troops once, I believe, but Nepal has remained independent, and the few foreigners who have been there have been invited personally by the Maharajah, after months of diplomatic discussion. I know; I'd love to go too. It's the true Shangri-la, I understand, but it's out for us. Finish your drink. We're starting for Tibet in the morning."

That was that. Tibet. We could enter Tibet, via Kashmir, climb through snow to Leh and Laddahk, enter the so-called forbidden land and bring back the first honest full-length film on the country. No heroics. It would be a hard journey, but we should not exaggerate it. Our audience, we thought honourably, deserved the truth.

But as we flew over the Bay of Bengal to Calcutta, retracing the air route which had brought us out, I looked at the clouds massed like snow to the north and thought of the Himalayas which bordered Nepal. That great cone of white might be Mount Everest, I thought wistfully, and there would be

Kinchinjunga, twenty-eight thousand feet high, and Dayabung. Beneath them, between India and Tibet, was the first and last of the truly forbidden lands: Nepal.

Armand seemed to be talking to himself rather than to Leila and me.

"It's probably very much like India. It's probably over-rated because it's so little known. My guess is . . ."

"Tibet?"

"Nepal."

There it was again. The ghost of the expedition: Nepal.

Our plane tobogganed smoothly, sliding through rain so thick it looked like icicles, into Dum dum airport, a few miles from Calcutta. Jack was waiting for us with the three cars which had come by boat. We drove through jumbled streets to the Great Eastern Hotel, and went up in the elevator with a sacred bull.

As all bulls in India are sacred, you are as likely as not to meet one sitting on your doorstep or blocking the road in front of your car. And you will either go around him, carefully, or wait for him to move, knowing that if you should hurt a hair of the arrogant creature's tail the swarming crowds would tear you limb from limb. No one owns these animals. They are bought and turned loose on the streets by some Indian with a sin to expiate. They fatten and flourish at the expense of the devout, and make a havoc of the traffic in Calcutta. The bull which roamed our hotel, and which none dared evict, must have been a joy and a vengeance for the Indians who were forbidden to enter the better British Clubs. The Great Eastern had for years been his home, the elevator his sanctum. As Nepal haunted my dreaming days, so that smug bull made my nights horrible with plans of how I might viciously dispose of it.

It rained on our first day in Calcutta, and we planned to leave for Tibet, via Kashmir, before the end of the week. But six days later it was pouring and we learned that several villages in Bengal were completely inundated. When ten days had passed and the roads were so thick with flood refugees, with their carts and baggage, that it was impossible for us to drive even over the Hoogli Bridge, we—and our sacred bull—

gave up all thought of going outdoors. We endured our confinement only by giving parties at the hotel for both Europeans and Indians who were brave enough to come. We gave stupendous parties in the air-cooled dining-room which had the only tolerable climate in Calcutta, and to them came not only the "pukka sahibs" at the top of colonial society, but whatever conjurer or nautch girl or yogi or priest might in any way be entertaining.

On the seventeenth day, when an all-time record for continuous rain had been established, Armand, with a face as grim as the weather, was serving cocktails as graciously as could be expected of a leader whose expedition seemed likely to be mired forever in this abominable luxury. Our morale was very low. Here we were, explorers, exploring among the cocktail snacks. I looked at Leila, imperturbable and charming as always, but forcing her laughter now; at Roy, slumped over his lemonade; at Jack, clutching his whisky as if he would strangle the glass.

Armand was talking to a dark bloom of a native girl whom we all had noticed. "So," he was saying, "we'll start for Tibet the first moment the weather clears."

She pulled her sari tighter at the throat. "But why Tibet, Mr. Denis? Everyone has been there. Wouldn't you rather see Nepal?"

"Nepal! Heavens, yes, but that's impossible, you know. We foreigners are simply not permitted in there. The Maharajah is very reasonably worried that the English will filter in just as they did in India, until . . ."

"Perhaps it could be arranged anyway," said that golden bloom of a girl. "You see, my father is the Maharajah . . ."

Only the guests at that memorable cocktail party can believe that the rains ceased just then. It was a miracle, wrought by the miracle of Nepal being suddenly opened to us. We could hear the traffic in the streets again with the cessation of the thundering rain. We heard the cries of the *gharri* drivers, the glad shouts of the ragged children who sold sweets and fruit. And the sun still shone in the morning when the Princess Saya Mala sent a telegram to her august parent in Nepal,

to be taken by runner from Raxaul on the Indian frontier across the Himalayan foothills to the mysterious capital, the city of our dreams, Khatmandu.

The answer to the telegram would of course be "No." Such great ambitions as ours are not achieved casually, by a chance meeting, even with a Princess, in the rain. None of the old residents of Calcutta had ever been to Nepal, and the library showed me, in the half-dozen books written by men who had actually been invited there, that the negotiations required in every case at least a year. I had no doubt that the daughter's request would weigh heavily with the Maharajah, but she, I had heard, was one of some astronomical number of progeny and might indeed be no longer a favourite, if he remembered her at all.

She came to tea with her husband, a Prince of neighbouring Assam. Chowdree was without question the most remarkable man of any Eastern race I had ever known, a political and financial and mechanical genius who owned a chunk of Assam that was plainly visible on the smallest map. Though he was still in his twenties he had amassed a fortune by intelligent economy and had become politically famous as the legislator of an ideal province. But he had talents in addition to these, and unlike most Indians his great wealth in no way prevented the employment of them. He was an architect, untrained, of amazing ability; he was an heroic hunter among the beasts that infest Assam; he was an industrial designer of such parts that he built, almost unaided, the monoplane in which he travelled from Calcutta to his jungle home.

A day or two later Armand, Leila and I, went to visit them in their town house.

It was an aerial palace, of square and circular rooms spaced by courts where peacocks and great-billed birds roamed without restriction. There were fountains outside and in, one had in its centre a sleek model of Chowdree's own plane, constructed by himself and ingeniously motored by the current of water which not only revolved the propeller but alternately lifted the plane, as if upon a sudden wind current,

and pointed its nose from side to side of the enormous chamber.

We walked down a corridor glowing green through illuminated glass bricks, past a nude female statue thirty feet high, up a flight of winding stairs treaded with some black stone and into a room the size of a banquet hall, pure white, dazzling, walled and floored with marble and ceiled with a pale wood that caught and refracted light like mother-of-pearl. Tall Sikh servants in scarlet coats and intricately wound turbans stood at regular intervals around the hall, each with a tabouret holding a special drink—Scotch, cocktails, liqueurs, lemonade.

One end of the hall led to a globular chamber with a high, domed ceiling. In the centre was a small, circular swimming pool filled with illuminated purple water and surrounded by low divans which were covered with the soft skins of snow leopards. A pet crane minced to the water's edge, slashed down his bill and caught a goldfish. I saw that the bottom of the pool was mirrored.

The golden Princess smiled quizzically at us when we returned to the marble hall. My glass was replenished so neatly I scarcely knew it had left my hand. We moved towards the welcome breeze wafted across the balcony which ran the entire length of that immense room. The tops of the trees moved gently beneath us, and beyond we could see the Hoogli River, jewelled by the lights of the embankment.

Down the balcony came the Prince of Assam. Suddenly there was a screech in the treetops. A branch bent down to the rail and from it leaped a small, black, woolly ape, a gibbon, one of the most intelligent of the anthropoids. Holding both long arms in the air for balance, as only gibbons do, he ran towards his master and jumped into his arms. It was only then that we saw the envelope he held in one fist.

Saya Mala laughed at our bewilderment. "He's the mailman," she said. "He waits all day and night in the trees by the gate to get the mail. And when we read it, if it's good news, he goes wild with delight; if it's a bill he tries to snatch it away and tear it up. No one taught him. My husband

had to shoot his mother for food when he was on *shikar* in Assam, and we have loved him like an adopted child. Now watch him."

Armand and Leila were visibly suffering with envy, for at their amazing home in Connecticut, half farm, half zoo, they had once had a gibbon, and the quest of another to replace their beloved Playboy was, I always thought, one of the secret purposes of this expedition.

Chowdree, speaking through the gibbon which had encircled his chest and neck, said, "A telegram. It's for you, Saya."

The Princess took it from him, and the ape's black wistful face turned to watch her eagerly.

"It is from Nepal," she said.

"Nepal? Already?" We forgot the wondrous gibbon and stood breathless while she took an interminable time to open the envelope.

She smiled and nodded thoughtfully.

"You may go," she said. "My father the Maharajah cordially invites the Denis-Roosevelt Asiatic Expedition to his country, and will permit it to make certain moving pictures there. The first professional films," she added, "that will ever have been made."

We were so eager to reach Nepal before the gods and the Maharajah could change their minds that we raced our cars north from Calcutta, pausing only occasionally to film the strange tribes which our two Indian servants, Ram and Chand, pointed out to us along the way. We hurried through Chander-nagore, a minute French colony surrounded by British India. We came to Gobindpur, where the Santals live, and drove on towards Benares on the Grand Trunk Road. It was flat land, scenically dull but for the Indians who moved languidly over it. Biblical men carried long staves for protection from beasts and bandits. Most of the women were in *purdah*—wearing black veils to conceal their faces. Camels, enormously high, dragging tiny carts, passed us, their brakes of stone grinding against the solid wooden wheels.

Storks and monkeys strolled and loped in the road ahead of us, and occasionally we saw an antelope grazing in the fields. The little villages, unfriendly to white men, we drove through directly. Once a crowd of bearded old men rushed from a temple at our cars, waving their arms for us to stop. Once, with our windows safely closed, we ploughed through some sort of a riot in one of the villages; a score of men were milling along its single street, belabouring each other indiscriminately with black umbrellas. And once, when we stopped in the evening at a small lamp-lit stall to drink tea, a young religious agitator burst into the midst of us and harangued the rapidly gathering crowd. It seemed that we white men who were lower than the lowest caste, more despicable than the Untouchables, had so fouled the tea cups that they never could be used again. More than that, we had polluted the whole stall; it must be torn down. The crowd muttered. The poor proprietor wept and pulled his hair. The insolence of the youth was annoying, but it was his country, not ours, and his strange religion. When the crowd grew restless and packed around us we pushed in a wedge to the cars and drove out of town.

Soon we left the Trunk Road for a short cut on an abominable track to Benares. Gypsies, known here as the Criminal Tribes, stared sullenly at us as we passed their high wooden carts and tent-shaped shacks of straw so low that they had to enter them on hands and knees. These nomads made their living by thievery and the capture of animals for the great animal market at Calcutta. Some caught birds with lime-smeared switches of bamboo which they raised gently through the branches of a tree where a bird was resting. A touch of the lime to a wing would so glue the feathers that the bird would fall. Some were expert at snaring monkeys, and some, whom we sought in vain, could reputedly call all the jackals of a district to them.

They were a handsome people, wily and independent as their kind all over the world. When we stopped by their carts at night the girls would come rushing up to us, laughing and staring into our cars, until their Chief, usually an older



He was very holy ("crumby", said Jack)



Corner in Kathmandu

man, with a seamed, brown, bearded face, cuffed them away and arrogantly demanded our business.

As we approached holy Benares the cattle in the road forced us to slow or stop continually, and wait for them to move their sacred bodies to one side. To brush one of them might easily have meant death for us, as we were soon to learn. More frequently too we saw funeral processions on their way to the ghats, the bodies smoking with incense as their bearers trotted with them along the narrow lanes, wailing to the quick beat of drums.

Benares was bedlam, a jumble of spires and squatting death houses, of Hindu temples converted into Mohammedan mosques, of minarets shaken by earthquake and settling obliquely into the river. We walked through the valleys surrounding the golden temple built by the Rajah of Lahore. Fanatic men were yelling prayers at hidden shrines. Beggar children mewed like crippled kittens. A colossal husband growled at us when we admired his tiny wife's anklets, and the great black-faced and pink-behind Hanuman monkeys snarled at us when we paused to look at the bloody head of a buffalo lying before a shrine to Siva.

"There's a feeling of lunacy about to break loose," said Roy, above the din of gongs and bells and people screaming their faith.

The pungent, fetid, spicy smell of India was thick in our nostrils as we tried to find our way out from those narrow walls. Even in the alley where only toys were sold there was an air of suppressed menace, of hatred for all men who were white. The streets of the brasses led us on, then the street of silver where deft workmen incised their exquisite jewellery. I put my eye to a round hole in a wall; I looked into a temple whose floor was made entirely of silver rupees. Slipping across it was a stream of blood from a goat which had just been beheaded at the feet of the black and scarlet monster of a goddess, the great Kali.

This was no longer fun. There was not a white face anywhere. We were hopelessly lost in that dark and howling maze of high-walled streets. And when we came to the open

river, the beloved Ganges, it was no longer comforting. Miles of ghats led down in broken steps to the water. There were cubicles for meditation built into them, and quiet, nude figures sitting there. Straw parasols sprouted like tipsy mushrooms to shelter the priests who served the millions of pilgrims who came here annually. Men and women were solemnly immersing themselves, sanctifying their sinful flesh, muttering prayers.

"Satisfied?" asked Armand.

"Sated," I said. "Let's get on to Nepal."

It was my turn to drive, but I could not for a long time escape the memory of Benares. Beauty there had been, inestimable splendour, a richness of tradition and ritual that set the mind agasp. Colour and movement and passion ran riot in Benares, when you were in its midst, but once on the open road again, with the fields cool and green beside you and the low sun tugging at its thin scarves of wind, you saw that what had passed for beauty was sick at heart of it, that its movement was convulsive and its passion perverse.

So I was thinking when I saw Armand's car ahead suddenly swerve and nearly tip over the high soft banks of the road.

"Watch it! Cow!" Roy yelled.

The cow had swung to the centre of the road. We were going too fast to stop, and if we tried to pass on the sandy shoulder of the road we would certainly tip over.

"Hold on, Roy!"

I jammed my foot on the accelerator. The car soared forward, curved with two wheels in the sand, smashed into the tail of the cow and knocked it somersaulting down the bank. There was a terrifying whirr as the wheels spun in the sand. At last they gripped, jerked us out to the road again.

"Good," said Roy. "Where's the cow?"

The cow, apparently none the worse for the collision, had picked herself up and was looking with some surprise at her sacred rump. Our right headlight was shattered and the fender crumpled, but I was thankful to be still on the road and alive.

"Step on it!" Roy shouted suddenly. I stepped on it hard

when I saw men rushing towards me from the fields on both sides of the road. I had no doubt of their intentions. We had assaulted the holiest thing in India, and even though it had been to save our own lives I wouldn't have given a rupee for our chances if those religious fanatics caught us.

Armand's horn blared back to us as he too accelerated. It looked as if everyone in the village ahead had crowded into the road to stop us. Armand had to slow down in order not to run over them. Roy turned the radio full on and in a moment a jangling Hindu broadcast from Delhi filled the car and the narrow village street as we swung through that threatening crowd. They parted before Armand's car, closed in before us, parted again when the hellish racket of horn and radio reached them. Glancing quickly in the mirror I saw that Jack's truck was close behind, that it had got through. Accelerating again, we reached the open country and safety.

"Sorry," I said. "There was nothing else to do."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE LAND OF THE EYE

We came to Patna, at last, the last large town in India where we could leave our cars, and drove exhausted down the fourteen crowded miles of its single street. The ex-Prime Minister of Behar, with marvellously long hairs in his ears which he kept caressing, told us that the ferry was crossing the sacred river Ganges almost immediately. We wired for private cars on the night train to Raxaul. We garaged our Dodges. We whispered good-bye to India with the last of our strength, saw our sixty-five pieces of baggage hurled on the deck of the little *S.S. Sasipur* and sailed diagonally across the Ganges towards the flames of the cremation fires on the other shore. As far as we could see along both banks there were fires consuming the flesh of men, all but the navels which would be floated to paradise by the holiest river in the world.

"There's the train!" said Armand. "Good Lord, it's moving!"

The *S.S. Sasipur* collided with the bank and we rushed ashore in the wake of Ram, our warrior cook, who drove an army of laden coolies ahead of him. The train was backing up now, then again it was moving slowly forward, sashaying back and forth as if the thing were worried that, once stopped, it might never again go journeying along its narrow tracks. We finally leaped aboard and collapsed into our own two carriages.

When I awakened in the morning, Jack was leaning farther out of the window than I thought any man could balance. The train had stopped.

"Raxaul," he said. "And that's Nepal. And the back side of those mountains is Tibet."

Explorers should be unemotional people, accustomed to

marvels, but I felt a shiver run up my spine when I looked across the frontier and saw stretching from far east to far west the stupendous Himalayas. The horizon was rimmed with snow-capped peaks, glittering pink and gold in the first light of dawn, five hundred jagged miles of them, the roofs of the world beneath which lay Nepal and Tibet.

Already the atmosphere was changing as the winds from Central Asia came roaring over those roofs, to slumber in Nepal and drift drowsily towards us. There was less perfume in the air than in India, and even though it was wafted over twenty miles of jungle and swamp it still bore the sweet clean smell of snow. Mount Everest, almost thirty thousand feet high, was sending a breeze from near Heaven to welcome us.

We changed into an even smaller train consisting of an engine and a single car with the shield of the Maharajah of Nepal emblazoned on it. An elephant, curiously hairy-browed, watched us impassively as our train did deep-breathing exercises in preparation for its trip through the Terai, that fever-haunted and tiger-infested country that is the first natural barrier to Nepal. Raxaul and India were behind us at last; so too was Birganj, the border station of the Nepalese railway. For twenty miles we puffed and jerked across the fearful jungle of the Terai keeping our eyes peeled for tiger and rhinoceros, as both were frequently seen along these tracks. Here the Maharajah went hunting, explained the dapper youth in European clothes who sat beside me, and in two months last year had shot one hundred and thirty tigers. Himself? Yes, he was a Nepalese returning home from school in India. Nepal? We would not be allowed to see very much, said young Thapa smugly; we would be guarded. A German entomologist who had slipped away from his guard a few years ago had had his entire collection confiscated, films, bugs, everything. Yes, the Nepalese wanted to keep their country secret from prying western eyes, but he himself had travelled the length and breadth of it. He had climbed to the sacred Lake of Gosainthan, sixteen thousand feet high in the Himalayas, and had seen beneath its icy waters the temple of the god Mahadeo, and the god himself. Of the thousand pilgrims who started

on that pilgrimage, as they do each year, only a hundred returned with him. The rest had died of cold and hunger. On the way back he had offered prayers for them at that other lake where great serpents lived in nests of snow.

Our little train staggered out of the jungle to a little station marked "Amelekhganj," at the end of the line, and we moved ourselves and baggage to a very ancient Buick which would take us a few more miles to Bhimphedi where the road ended and we should start the climb over the Himalayan foothills, the Mahabharat Range.

"Maharajah car," said the driver. "Thirty rupee." So that was it; and that would be it for the length of our stay. The Maharajah, running his ideal kingdom of Nepal like a private estate, would tax our every move for the privilege of peering into the last of the forbidden lands.

We rocketed out of Amelekhganj over an admirable but stony road. We climbed into the hills and looked down at bald, serrated escarpments of sandstone. The dry beds of cascades, which during the wet weather must have been torrential, swung past us, then great waterfalls sliding beneath the road, with the first clear water we had seen since Europe. We rounded a cliff on two wheels.

"This," said Leila, "is the end." We careened over a ridge and vol-planed down with the motor cut off, for our fiend of a driver was conservative with gas. He was so conservative with brake linings, too, that apparently he did without them.

"To die," quoth Armand, "when one reaches one's goal, to die in Paradise."

I reached over and slapped our driver on the back of the neck. "Slow down!" I shouted. "Kubberdar!" But when he screwed around in his seat to stare at me I just gave up and gently screwed his head back again until it faced the road ahead.

It was only on the upgrades that we had a chance to see the people of Nepal, lighter than the Indians and with the suggestion of Mongol heritage in their eyes and cheekbones, the men wearing a sort of white jodhpurs which fitted the calf and was surmounted by a flounce of shirt-tails around the

waist. The collarless shirt overlapped itself at the throat and was held together by a civilized vest.

Little skull caps were perched jauntily on straight black hair. The women, with brilliant, belted dresses and gold ear-rings like carafe stoppers, marched sedately upon their errands. Tough, snappy little Gurkha soldiers saluted us, and pilgrims from Tibet, with square, seamed faces glowered.

We bounced through a village of cane huts and ground to a stop before a gaping hole in a cliff a thousand feet high. A little shrine stood beside the cave, but to what god it was devoted I could not tell, the idol was so smeared with yellow and vermillion unguents which the devout had rubbed upon it to make their prayers adhere. Large and little bronzed and verdigrised bells were hung all over the shrine.

Our driver got out to buy a tiny red and yellow canna from an old man who sat at the entrance of the cave. He touched two fingers to a tray of red and yellow paints, tied the flower to the windshield, daubed his forehead with the paint, refreshing the caste-mark that is called a *tilka*, raised his two hands in prayer and quietly got into the car again.

None of us spoke. We also felt that we should be beholden to the gods if they permitted us to pass in safety through the tunnel to the valley beyond. A secret land should be entered like this, I thought.

We roared away into the evil darkness, haunted with demons. Water dripped upon us from the timbers overhead and a gaseous odour caught at our throats. We tore along dizzily, regardless of anyone who should be coming towards us, and when we emerged into rain we felt we had sunk onto another world. Without slackening speed our driver raised his hands again in thankfulness and we sped through great fields of corn that wound away over the hills to the north. A doe by the roadside gazed sweetly at us. We skidded through a village of houses which we were soon to recognize as typically Nepalese, chalet-style buildings with jutting eaves supported by carved struts out-thrust from white walls. Their windows were tightly grilled with intricately engraved lattices of wood. The cleanliness of the streets, the mountains, the air like a thin cologne, was

reminiscent of Switzerland and Haute-Savoie. Nothing could be more unlike the swarming, festering India we had just left. There was peace on this land, and kindness. There was nothing to warn us that in the corners of it and the dark places, the temples and the secret courtyards, lay horrors which we should come to know and remember always.

Now we were climbing steadily, to three thousand and four thousand feet according to Armand's altimetre, when suddenly we saw far ahead in the road a troupe of giant Hanuman monkeys. They disappeared up the face of the cliff and we forgot them. Suddenly a boulder came hurtling just in front of the wheels of our car. An accident, we thought; a landslide. But we had not gone fifty yards when another terrific rock, weighing at least a hundred pounds, shot from the cliff above, bounced twice on the slope beside us, barely missed a fender and went plummeting into the river far below.

The driver held the accelerator to the floor and chattered wildly.

"He says it's the monkeys!" Chand told us. "They always throw stones when white people come."

It was incredible, but it was true as we saw a few minutes later. We were straining from the sides of that machine of hell, staring at the bare top of the cliff, when Jack shouted. The driver slammed on the brakes, which did not stop us at all, while we watched three old, grey monkeys crawling busily around a large rock which seemed to be balanced just on the edge of the cliff face. The car rolled steadily on. Jack flung himself over the front seat at the gear shift but Ram, Chand, and the driver were all blocking his way. We watched, fascinated and helpless, as the rock tipped slowly over the edge, then came straight for us. Jack groaned. Roy laughed. Ram, Chand, and the driver cowered beneath the dash. Armand whistled with sheer admiration at this zoological wonder. Leila swore shockingly. I just looked wondering vaguely whether I could recall these individual reactions when I should be writing books in some other life.

The rock landed like a meteor, five feet behind us, and stayed where it fell, half buried in the road.

"Step on it!" Armand bawled at the driver.

He did. We careened up hill around corners, while I fumbled for a cigarette and reflected upon this peaceful land which even the beasts wished to keep inviolate. The gods of rain, at least, had realized we would bring no harm to Nepal, for the blue mist was lifting as we approached Bhimpedi, the town where we would spend the night. The sun, slid smoothly into a crease of the mountains, and the last of its rays fell upon the high empty house which was to be ours.

We set the canvas cots on the stone-paved floors, rigged mosquito netting from wall to wall with a labyrinth of strings that confused us almost as much as the mosquitoes, and went out separately into the growing darkness to see what we could of the town before night filled it completely.

I should be contented here, I thought, but I was ill at ease. I felt a stranger. Not an intruder. No; I felt more like a ghost, barely visible, returning, a benign ghost of whom the villagers were quite unafraid. Most of them had probably never seen a white man, yet they showed no curiosity and were too polite to stare. Men smiled quickly in the candle-glow of their open shops and continued their selling of tobacco, small potatoes, onions, green peaches, cloth, lump salt and rice of various colours. Or they would look up from the games they played with cowrie shells or from the smoking of their silver-mounted water pipes, acknowledge me, then promptly forget what was just another ghost in their ghost-ridden land. Both men and women were only occasionally beautiful, but all showed a character which the bland natives of India lacked. They were a hardier people, of obvious pride and independence and there was not a beggar anywhere.

I followed music through the narrow stone streets until I came to a square that was filled with it, with the sound of various bells and of flutes and drums. Four groups of musicians sat at shrines devoted to Ganesh, Hanuman, Siva, and Bhairab, paying no attention to one another but each chanting and plying its instruments to attract the attention of its god. Our Princess in Calcutta had said that her people were musical; they were once so famed as musicians, indeed, that when

Prithwi Narayan with his Gurkha army captured Kirtipur in 1765 he ordered the lips and noses to be cut from whoever could not play a musical instrument. The name of the city was changed thereafter to Naskatipur, "The City of Cut Noses," and it has fostered musicians ever since.

Without pausing in their song the first group gestured me to a place on the grand with them. They were swaying wildly, clinking small cymbals together, beating wildly with the heel of one hand and the fingers of the other upon conical drums which were painted black and red. One bearded virtuoso, holding a baby in his lap, played a kind of primitive harmonium with amazing dexterity. His hand was quicker than my eye, a blur of action, yet I felt that it was precise in its aim at the yellow keys even when it struck a note too lightly to sound. The rhythm was elusive; it was barbaric in beat yet sophisticated, with a subtle counterpoint of bell-notes and flute-notes and a whispering that overlaid the almost hysterical song.

High in the dark above us was the idol of Hanuman, the Ape, a figure of red clay obscenely dancing. And the great eyes of Buddha which we were to see everywhere throughout Nepal glared from the roofs of temples to remind man that Buddha watched his every move. This was The Land of the Eye.

One of the many fantastic anomalies of Nepal is this admixture of religions. Tibetan, Buddhism, and Hinduism which elsewhere are bitter rivals. The kindly tenets of Buddhism—which requires the more zealous of its priests even to strain the water they drink for fear of killing an invisible insect—and the gory sacrifices of Hinduism seem naturally incompatible, but in Nepal they are so congenial that a temple to Kali, the Destroyer, will often be surrounded by little Buddhist shrines, or *chaityas*. Pilgrims travel a thousand miles from central India to make their devotions at Pashupatti, and pilgrims from Tibet stagger over passes in the Himalayas twenty thousand feet high to visit the Buddhist sanctuaries, for Gautama Buddha was born on the border of Nepal. Hinduism is now the religion of most of the Nepalese and Buddhism is being absorbed by it,

as it has been in most of India, although a High Lama is still maintained at Khatmandu.

Our good man Chand had already assembled a crowd of sixty ragged, barefooted coolies when we wakened in the morning. The sun was just rising. The sky in the west was the tint of green apples, in the cloud-flecked east like apple blossoms, and the air had the scent of apples, sharp and sweet together. Now we could see that our village was ringed by its own mountains, a snug and compact place of thatched stone houses and narrow streets suddenly widening into squares where shrines, dragon-guarded, held gilt roofs to the first rays of the rising sun. The little bells of the morning devotion were ringing everywhere, and the white-robed worshippers, with silver mantra boxes and talismans around their necks, walked quietly to place offerings of flowers at the feet of their animal gods. A boy was laughingly riding a temple dragon. An old jeweller was busy incising a pair of enormous gold anklets to weight the wandering feet of some Nepalese wife. There were brilliant paper banners fluttering over his humble shop front, and as I stood watching there came from the woods a gold and silver peacock to alight upon his roof. This first town of Bhimpnedhi seemed a token of Nepal. In the very air of it was a feeling of peace and ease, of contentment and self-sufficiency. I was superfluous.

Our mechanic Jack was less interested in spiritual Nepal. "Will you look . . ." he was saying. "Just you look at that!"

Following the ridge of a mountain and spanning a valley was the cableway which the Maharajah had built for the transport of his supplies, a splendid instrument of modern engineering running for seventeen miles across the Mahabharat Range to the ancient capital of Khatmandu. Travelling steadily at above five miles per hour the baggage swings rode up one cable and returned on the other, propelled by colossal machinery at each end. Our heavier baggage would travel in this way. It was another instance of the Maharajah's singular wisdom in importing the best that civilization could offer while strictly forbidding the civilized whites who, with their science, would also inevitably bring disease, discontent,

and an alien politics to his happy people. The fact that there was electricity in Khatmandu, a university, a modern hospital, a highly trained army, made the land all the more fantastic when I considered its complete isolation from the rest of the world and the absolute secrecy with which it was guarded.

Our sixty coolies had contracted to carry us and our equipment over the mountains for three rupees, about a dollar, apiece—seventeen miles of terrible travel over two passes eight thousand five hundred feet high. The baggage would be borne on their backs, supported by head-straps of crude rope, and we were to be carried in curious litters, called "dandies" or "doolies" in the East since people of the exalted classes must never climb mountains on foot in Nepal. But no dandies arrived. We waited an hour with the coolies wrangling around us, fighting for the lighter loads while the headman good-naturedly walloped them across the ears and Roy with the Akeley made close-ups of bare feet that were cracked like lava fields.

Pilgrims from India went by occasionally, blind to the world about them. They neither saw us nor that straight wall of mountain, the first serious barrier on their way to salvation. Three old men plodded hand in hand, a *saddhu* with his begging bowl and iron tongs. And travelling among them like an inch-worm was a naked Hindu, measuring his length on the ground, standing, falling, stretching his claws as far as they would reach, then rising to walk three paces and repeat the performance. From time to time he shouted to the other pilgrims and they would reply. His eyes were staring. He was blind, but none the less he would make his pilgrimage across the mountains, naked in the rain and the bitter cold of the passes, grovelling towards his gods.

It was no use waiting any longer if we wished to reach the rest-house of Sisaghari that night. We would have to climb on foot, which was beneath our social dignity, of course, but we were toughened by adventure in Burma and China, we thought; a little Himalayan hike like this would be good for us.

We climbed, straight up for two thousand feet past small clouds like islands against the green sea of the mountain

jungle. There was a path of sorts, strewn with boulders and crumbly underfoot. The hundred-pound loads of the coolies seemed to inconvenience them not at all and even the shaggy, bearded ancients and the coolie children tubercularly coughing passed us by. We, the hardened explorers, plodded, all but Leila who valiantly rushed even ahead of the porters so that she would have more time to sit and rest while the others of us were panting in her wake. I gulped for breath and felt my heart pounding. And higher still we could see our heavy baggage travelling comfortably along the cableway to Kathmandu, a tantalizing spectacle. In three hours it would be there, and it would take us two long hard days.

When we reached five thousand feet and sprawled along a ridge while Ram cooked tea, we saw the valley for a minute clearly, the thatched cottages and shoe-string streets, the golden roofs of the little shrines; then swiftly they were obliterated by soft grey clouds, and the tops of pines on the mountainside showed mistily, floating. The purest rain in the world began to fall on us but we scarcely noticed; we were so enchanted by the scene and so exhausted that we could scarcely distinguish one discomfort from another. Our ragged porters sat among bluebells and small pink flowers, smoking brown cigarettes through their fists. They would clasp the cigarette between little finger and palm, fold the other fingers down to make a tube and suck noisily—a method which nearly asphyxiated us who tried it.

I felt my joints had welded when we got to our feet again and none of us were cheered when out of the fog burst the apparition of eight coolies yoked to the sort of dandy we had been promised. They came at a trot, chanting, and sitting high above their heads on a throne of black leather and red plush was a gigantic Brahman, bearded, turbaned, arrogant, contemptuous as only a Brahman can be who sees the despicable white man plodding under his own power through a land where the high-caste must be carried by his inferiors, whether beasts or men. He ignored us, but Armand, who once in his extraordinary career had been a monk in a Belgian monastery, called down a fine Flemish anathema upon his head.

That cheered us somewhat, though we still kept peering through the fog for the dandies our headman had promised. We were not averse to riding as proudly as a Brahman now.

Gradually we caught up with the Indian pilgrims who had started ahead of us, and we felt considerably better about our prowess. Ram and Chand, carrying only umbrellas as befitted the servants of sahibs, saluted the pilgrims haughtily then rushed ahead to try once more to hold the umbrellas over our heads. It was impossible to discourage them. Our guard and headman, a Gurkha with a great carved *khukri* in his belt and another incongruous umbrella in his hand, regarded us as idiots evidently, for he cast us baleful looks and shook his head, muttering.

We felt our way cautiously, hugging the cliff on our left, and crawled on hands and knees over the natural bridge that spanned the waterfall. Wild apple trees switched our faces in the mist and when we stumbled from the path we had to crawl through giant rhododendrons that reared like scraggy ghosts barring our way to their secret land.

We rose above the fog during the last five hundred yards to Sisaghari Fort and the sun fell golden upon the flight of steps approaching it. It was built of stone upon a pinnacle, connected to the main mountain mass by a drawbridge which looked dangerous even for its legitimate users, but the little Gurkha soldiers trotted complacently over it to welcome us with solemn smiles. No one could pass into or out of Nepal without being observed by the watchman of this eyrie. They had been advised of us by runner from Khatmandu.

We staggered up the stairs, our boots full of water, our clothes sopping, and limped along the high-crowned streets. We had hardly the breath to talk at this eight-thousand foot altitude. Small boys, incurious of us, expertly played a game resembling marbles before a shrine with a roof of gold leaf. There were brass pennants flying stiffly on each side of it and a pair of great iron scales suspended from a gable, perhaps to weigh the sacrifice which God Hanuman, the monkey god, deserved for various favours.

The little houses were softly modelled of pink cement, with

rounded corners inside, as we could see by the tapers illuminating the single rooms. Pure white geese pecked the golden corn on the jet-black doorsteps. Invisible doves were cooing, the exact watery sound made by the three girls, as lovely as any I had ever seen, who were washing clothes in a fountain. They resembled Polynesians more than natives of the world's highest mountains.

The chicken we ate that night could no more relax its taut muscles than we, but we ate it down, before the tiny fire of the huge rest-house which the Maharajah had built for his infrequent visits to India. I was content just to be sitting down somewhere in Nepal. Armand smiled at his chicken, placid and happy as only a director can be who has a new story, exclusively his own to film. But Roy was ecstatic and active. Here, he said, was water, cold clean water such as we had had nowhere else for the development of test strips from the film, an extremely important check on any motion picture work. In the jungles of Burma, even at night, when we would test the temperature of running streams which seemed actually cold to the hand, we found invariably that it was over eighty-five degrees, which necessitated the use of a hot water developer with consequently inferior results.

So Roy was as happy as a dry drunkard suddenly confronted with a drink. The rest of us drowsed by the fire, but Roy had his arms plunged to the elbows in the changing bag, clipping off six-inch strips from his rolls of exposed film and winding them on to the developing reel. Ram and Chand watched him fascinated. His eyes stared blissfully into space; his hands made mysterious movements in the depths of the bag; there were snicking sounds and sounds of metal scraping metal like the sharpening of knives. And when the sorcerer began his falsetto rendering of "O Little Sir Echo, hello, hello!"—so rapturous was he—the poor natives fled to their pots and pans. And we to bed.

There was clear light over the mountains at six a.m., the sweet crisp dawn reflected from the high snowfields bordering Tibet just a few miles north. To the south we could see the

hills we had already traversed, blue rolls of them rising from the marshy and malarial Terai. Far beyond lay the plains of India, and the world.

I came down to the flagged courtyard that ran straight to the edge of nothingness and found Jack examining professionally the five large dandies and the two small ones that at last had arrived for us. They were like palanquins, or litters, consisting of a hooded coffin-shaped box suspended on a single pole with pivoting crossbars, fore and aft, that rested on the shoulders of the eight coolies who carried each of them. The outside of the box was black wood, the inside red velvet; a sumptuous vehicle which we disdained at first, but very shortly were glad to have.

When the porters picked up the dandies and gestured us to climb in only Ram and Chand accepted, for the rest of us were secretly ashamed to be borne on the shoulders of these little men, although it was the custom here, and certainly no more shameful than riding in a Chinese rickshaw. Ram and Chand had no such qualms. Holding umbrellas against the bright morning sun they went swaying up the track ahead of us. We whites came next, on foot, assuring each other that, sure, we felt fine . . . sure, it was a fairly tough climb yesterday . . . no, not stiff at all. . . . And behind us stretched for half a mile our crew of sixty coolies. The last of them, a boy of ten, carried on his head the two baskets containing our Chinese cat and Indian mongoose.

Here the track was wide but rough, filled with boulders as big as a man, and bordered by pines and false teak. Small, tight, orchidaceous blossoms shone like jewels against the green velvet foliage, but on almost every one there was a leech balanced on his tail and waving his blunt head to reach for man or beast that passed along the trail. One of the many amazing things about this unpleasant creature is that he can work from either end, for he has suction cups at both. He lies limp upon his throne of blossoms until somehow he becomes aware that you are passing, then rears up, waves like a tentacle and fastens to feed.

We climbed to eight thousand five hundred feet and rounded

a shoulder of the mountain to see the Himalayas briefly, pink and white against a pastel blue of sky. Gosainthan with its serpent lakes was straight ahead; Nanda Devi, 26,661 feet high, was just over there to the left with Nanga Parbat only a few feet lower. Remote on the north-eastern horizon, behind a wall of snow, we could see one golden point like a fulcrum to support the skies—Mount Everest, the highest thing on earth.

Armand had stopped ahead of us, a giant silhouetted against a gigantic world.

"We've got to shoot this, Roy. Ram! Chand! We'll get in the dandies, and tell the men to back up. Look, Roy, why don't you try it from that slope there? Dave, get a production shot with Roy working in the foreground."

The coolies dragged the cameras up the hill. I hauled myself hand over hand to a ledge above Roy's position. It was an exciting scene with the seven dandies bearing Armand, Leila, Jack, Ram and Chand across the back-drop of glacial mountains, the coolies steaming in the frosty air. But we had scarcely focused when a long tongue of fog licked the scene away from us. It was as though the whole expedition had been swallowed by the mountain's maw.

Now that three-fifths of the expedition were already seated in the dandies it was neither hard for them to stay there nor shameful for Roy and me to heave our weary bones and cameras aboard. I took the lead in mine, facing backwards so that I could film the rest of the expedition. No one looked very comfortable, and Armand's eight men careened dangerously beneath his lean but long two hundred pounds. There was a pest of a lad vaguely attached to his company who kept circling around the barrow trying to help, but he was so small that he had to hunch his shoulder to touch the pole. The men on the precipice side carried long staves to prop them against crumpling into the ravine if they should stub their toes.

I couldn't avoid the faces of the porters bearing me, nor the row of ragged diagonal left shoulders under my rear crossbar. One lifted his fingers to his mouth beseeching a cigarette, but when I gave it to him already lighted he smiled

a sickly apologetic smile and dropped it over the cliff, for although he was a pariah in caste I as an infidel had polluted the tobacco with my lips. I passed him another which he lighted at a trot and lent in turn to his three companions. Armand was close behind me as we started the descent from the next pass of Chisapani to the vale of Chitung. I squatted to focus the Leica upon him, first with a long lens stopped at f.3.5. to haze the background, then with the two-inch, using both at one-thousandth of a second because of the jolting of our two dandies which would doubly blur any film taken at a lesser speed. One of his men was blind in one eye, one limped, and was an albino, as pink and white as a baby, and pimpled dark red.

There was a clatter from behind and the coolies jammed against the mountain wall. There was a shout and down came Roy upon a horse which none of us had seen before, a nag on roller skates, it seemed until, our intrepid cameraman introduced it as a boon from the Maharajah himself, sent to relieve us if we were tired of dandies. Roy was for prancing on ahead to film the descent of the expedition down this almost perpendicular valley, but Armand stopped him.

"We can't do it, Roy. It's too cruel. We know that if the Maharajah should ever hear that we walked into Khatmandu we'd lose so much face that he'd never help us at all, but damn it, you can't show American audiences a picture of grown men being carried by their poor little brown brothers: the lame, the halt, and the blind. I know it's a wonderful shot. . . . Let me try that horse."

Armand tried it and Leila tried it, a-spraddle and side-saddle, and so did I; and when the horse bit me, as horses invariably do, Jack mounted the beast and tried to post it. Downhill. The Maharajah's Boon slipped with all four feet and ended by leaning at a forty-five-degree angle against a tree.

Thereafter the animal was led riderless by the male nurse who had been sent with him and who kept assuring Chand that the Maharajah would be very, very displeased at the snub.

We crossed a river full of cyclopean boulders in clear, blue, icy water, the melting of snow, and struggled uphill again,

the coolies dripping from their vests and kilt-like shirt-tails. The jungle was so dense here that we had to shield our faces from the broad slapping leaves. The tinkle of a bell reached me from the green darkness ahead and grew quickly louder until suddenly just at my side there flashed a nearly naked runner holding a bamboo tube to which were attached two brass bells—the mail runner on his way from Bhimphedi to Khatmandu. All mail was carried into the country thus, by men trained from childhood to trot the seventeen mountainous miles without a stop. The bell was to warn all ahead of him to clear the way, or get food ready to hand him as he ran. And to advise them also that should its tinkling cease, if for only a moment, they might obtain a fine reward from the government for this information.

As I crouched in the dandy, dodging the wet leaves or fending them off as best I could with one hand while trying to use the camera with the other, a pain like the stab of a lance shot through my throat. I clapped my fingers to the upturned collar and felt a wad of flesh, slimy and hot, upon it. It was a leech bloated with my own blood. Carefully, holding its pulp of a body between two fingers, I touched it with my cigarette. There is no other way to remove them; if you attempt to pull them loose your skin comes too, and instead of the pain lasting but an hour or two—as it does when you burn them off—you will have an ulcerous sore for days.

I had just pressed my hand to my throat and withdrawn it covered with blood when I felt a stab of pain in the groin. There were three leeches there, maroon-coloured slugs sucking through the tough wool of my trousers. I was burning these off when another needle of pain shot into my ankle, and I knew that somehow, despite the high boots, a leech had entered, probably through an eyelet. I sucked hard on my cigarette and tasted the burning of blood, my blood, and as I peeled off the boot I saw that the faces and throats of the four coolies ahead had each one leech or more upon them.

Armand's voice came shouting through the jungle, then Chand's shrill cry of "*Bandkaro! Bandkaro! Stop!*" We tumbled

from the dandies and smoking furiously burned the creatures from each other's bodies. Leila, I think, was the only one who even attempted to be calm about it. And she had leeches in her hair.

"This never occurred to Dante," said Armand, trying to detach a particularly hardy leech. "Get out your soap and rub your hands and faces with it. It will help a little."

Through the trees we saw the valley, planted with corn, a sweep of yellow and green tipping from half-way up the next and last range of mountains between us and Khatmandu. The trees thinned, and a butterfly emerged from them as big as my hand. A beetle the size of a peach was heading for India by a secret beetle path on a ledge at the level of our eyes; another beetle followed, and a third, a dung-beetle, diligently rolling over and over a ball of dung, somersaulting beneath it, walking over its top until he fell upon his head, scrabbling to heave a shoulder under the lump that was twice as big as he and move it to the main path again. He, I suppose, was the pariah, of this pilgrimage.

The dandies heaved and rolled. The porters exchanged blows good-naturedly and would have engaged in a wrestling match despite their human burdens, but our headman rushed immediately to the battle, furled his umbrella and belaboured the men so wildly with it that Jack got a smart wallop across the knee. The umbrella bent like a hairpin on the limb of our iron mechanic. Jack howled for vengeance; the headman wailed that Jack had ruined his emblem of office. It required considerable diplomacy on Armand's part to settle matters and get us under way again.

We trotted through the tiny village of Markhu, an L-shaped street of thatched houses that were brilliant with the clusters of red and yellow corn drying at almost every window, then up over the rolling Ekdunta hills to race the rain across the vale of Chitung—little Nepal as it is called by the people. But the rain caught us. The coolies slipped and stumbled, and the headman made desperate moans while he waved his broken umbrella with one hand and fingered his long-bladed *kukri* with the other. I had never liked the look of him, and

now there was a nasty glint in his eyes when he turned to glare at us impartially.

"Tell him," Armand shouted to Chand, "that I'll buy him two new umbrellas." He looked none the happier for that.

We reached an ancient hostel before the dandies were completely drenched. It was uninhabited now, but the long porch gave us shelter while we ate a lunch of sardines and cold beans. The coolies, grouped as close to us as possible to see the wonders we performed, stuffed wads of rice into their faces and took time at last to remove the leeches from their bare legs.

Here we saw the first fine example of the old Newar architecture. Every inch of wood outside the hostel had been exquisitely carved by the aborigines of the valley. The struts supporting the wide eaves bore processions of lizards swallowing each other's tails, and the doorways, superbly proportioned, were flanked with rows of ducks and little gods. Wooden flowers grew everywhere. Vines twisted along the lintels. There was no waste and yet no jumbling of decoration, and the minutest design was religiously symbolic, an emblem of some sacred tale of long ago. There is no art for art's sake among the Nepalese.

We had to decide now whether or not we should film the dandies, for the climb to Chandraghiri pass would be the last before entering the great valley of Khatmandu. The objection to the scene was obvious: there would be many among our untravelled audience at home who would look aghast at supposedly democratic American explorers being carried by their brothers-under-the-skin, particularly since our brown brothers looked none too healthy, were streaked with blood and stumbled often. On the other hand our portrayal of Nepal would be dishonest if we did not show it. We must emphasize on film, as I do here, that the caste-system of Nepal, contrary to that of India, apparently causes very little unhappiness among the poorer people; it is their right, they feel, to earn their pittance by carrying the more fortunate over those terrible mountains. They have no word for de-

mocracy, and until they progress to the coinage of one they will be suspicious of white man or Brahman who will so bemean himself as to walk when he can afford to ride. That, they feel, is (1) lowering the prestige they admire, (2) refusing employment to those in need of it, and (3) affronting the very gods who had deliberately arranged life so that the rich should be rich and the poor should be poor and never the twain should meet.

"Finally," said Armand, climbing into his dandy again, "Nepal has kept its integrity and independence largely because of these same mountain barriers. Everything that goes into the country must be borne on the backs of men, with the result that the Nepalese have become the toughest porters in the world, so far as I know; and the Arctic is about the only place I haven't been in. Look: in Nepal men even carry men, and that's certainly of sociological importance to any thinking audience. Isn't it? Particularly when you remember that this country has *never* been filmed. . . . All right, Roy and Dave, set up. We'll shoot the dandies starting here."

Roy cajoled his way onto a balcony of one of the houses along the way. I smiled at an antique man who was squatting in his doorway cooking *chupattis*, a sort of pancake, and he permitted me to straddle the flame so that I could be far enough from the street to get most of the expedition on my still film.

From then on we walked, Roy and I, most of the way to Khatmandu; or rather we ran, for the dandy porters made good time, and in order to get approach shots we, with the coolies lugging our equipment, had to be far enough ahead to set up and be ready to film as the expedition passed. Then we would scramble to pack the precious lenses, fold the legs of the tripods and rush panting ahead again.

"How'd it look, Roy?" Armand would call as we rushed past at approximately half a mile an hour and Roy would say "Fine." He always said "Fine." An expert and honest cameraman was Roy.

Again we were climbing, past splendid waterfalls with

primitive, thatched mills set in caves beneath them. The earth changed to a red clay, as slippery as vaseline, that was exhausting to trudge through. Jack walked with us now to help carry the delicate equipment which we would not trust to the porters, but Armand and Leila had to stay with the dandies for the sake of the film. Hard as was the climbing in that clay, I far preferred it to the bone-breaking ride in the dandies. The coolies jogged along in step with the result that the dandy rider bounced at least six inches with every step. It was impossible to get them to stagger their individual rhythms so as to neutralize the bounces. Armand's dandy was the least popular among them, for he weighed a good deal more than any of the rest of us, but none the less the coolies bearing the vacant barrows would fight to relieve those stumbling under his. They would receive the same pay in the end, but by some curious proud reasoning they would not see their fellows earning the reward more diligently than they.

A strange, clamorous sound came from the fog ahead, a weird chanting with hysterical high notes. Armand raised his hand and our caravan stopped, listening.

"For God's sake, what's that?"

All the coolies gabbled at once. Ram, our warrior cook, bellowed at them. Little Chand, not to be outdone, clipped one of them across the ear and tried to make out what he was saying.

"Maybe he say, sahib, it is an automobile."

"Maybe he says so, does he? Don't be silly! What could an automobile be doing here? Does it sound like an automobile? It's more like a riot, I'd say. Ask someone else."

Chand started to clip the headman by mistake, then quickly collared another coolie. The headman glared and reached for his blade again.

"Maybe this one say," said Chand, "it is an automobile too."

"Let's go," Armand commanded. "Maybe this is not preposterous, but we'll find out in a minute. There can't be

an automobile for hundreds of miles. How the devil could a car get here? And make that god-forsaken sound?"

The discordant, desperate chanting broke out again as we slithered up through the mud. We turned round a rock pinnacle, climbed vertically again. We saw ahead of us suddenly a mass of figures such as one should supposedly see in a crystal globe, opalescent in the fog, dim and without heads, straining. There were dozens of them, yoked together. We couldn't see their faces for they were bent nearly to the ground. We were hardly sure that they were men.

They were men. There were seventy-seven of them, carrying upon their shoulders by an elaborate arrangement of ropes, poles, and yokes, the incredible burden of an automobile, a 1925 Dodge sedan. Two-thirds of them were in front pulling. The others surrounded the car, their shoulders straining against the crossbars of bamboo which passed beneath the chassis, while a dozen of the sturdiest pushed from behind, slewing the car around corners and bracing it when the front men had to ease up because of sudden ledges which blocked the path. Except for the wheels, which were carried on the backs of four female coolies, the car had not been dismantled.

"Maybe an automobile?" said Chand sweetly.

Maybe, I thought, this height has affected my head. That whole automobiles should be carried over the Himalayas by these little men was simply inconceivable. That there should be cars at all in the valley of Khatmandu was absurd. We didn't know then that three steam rollers had been transported in just this way, and one bronze equestrian statue which must have weighed two tons.

Singing in the fog and the rain, the mass of coolies struggled upwards, their voices shrilling occasionally when the strain seemed more than they could bear; hysterical voices; a sudden shout among them as some youngster felt his heart breaking on that rocky road. Roy filmed their legs, tense, shuddering with exhaustion. I filmed their faces, their mouths open around black teeth and yellow tongues, but all their eyes placid, resigned. Their leader was carried with them on the front bumper of the car. He danced up and down upon it,

conducting the chant and threatening the coolies with a long switch of bamboo. They would surge forward for a hundred feet or so, then rest a moment, their breath whistling, then their leader's voice would rise to a new fury of chanting and again they would lunge up the mountain, yowling, cursing, weeping the song.

They made almost as good time as our own coolies. Armand climbed ahead to film them, for Roy and I were dead on our feet. "Send up the sound!" he shouted. We unpacked the heavy sound-recording equipment and sent it ahead under the belligerent supervision of Ram and Chand. We could see Armand from time to time as the fog shifted, perched high on a rock like a flexible giraffe, his long legs planted wide, his body arched over the microphone. Though he might be a-crawl with leeches, smeared with mud and torn by the jagged rock of the climb, he would be ecstatically happy to record on film, with the amazing devices he himself had invented, the typical sounds of Nepal. His previous film, "Dark Rapture," had been made especially valuable to students of African culture by such precise recording. Whereas the average director of travel films is content to "dub" the sound when he gets back to his studio, Armand felt there was no honest way of reproducing the customs of strange peoples other than by first-hand and spontaneous recordings in the field.

Roy had reached him now and set up the mammoth camera which, by some magic I never could understand, transferred sound and scene to a single film. Leila was busy with the 16 mm. colour camera. I, with notebook in one hand, a Leica in the other and the Super Ikonta slapping my thorax with every step, tried to cover the scene from behind, keeping low enough, or attempting to look sufficiently like a coolie, to be unnoticeable.

Almost invariably any effective scene which you see in a travel film, though it may be absolutely authentic, has been staged. This is true of our own, of course. It is an unromantic necessity, but there is no other way. Paradoxically, it is almost impossible to make native actors look authentic

unless you make them act. In Africa, in the remotest jungle, if you were to film, for instance, a native dance without the knowledge of the dancers, you would more than likely find when the film was developed that somewhere in the crowd was a man wearing spats or a shirt, and your audience of wiseacres would cry, "Yah! Hollywood!" Conversely, if you stage the scene artificially, with attention to lighting, composition, and the elimination of non-essentials, such as spats and shirts, if you have your dancers drilled to perform only the act indigenous with them, and not imported, like spats or shirts, by some misdirected Arab trader, then your scene will look authentic to Africa—and be so, too.

But the Nepalese wouldn't act. They had no time for us. They were occupied with the herculean task of carrying an automobile over the mountains and, though we had white faces such as most of them had never seen they looked in preference at the rocks beneath their feet and heaved steadily ahead. We could not stop them. Chand waved a fistful of exotic Nepalese silver beneath their noses. They spurned it, and they would have climbed right over Armand and his infernal machines if he had not suddenly got out of their way.

Chanting, groaning, crying to their gods, they passed into the mists again, seventy-seven robots roped to an alien engine in which they would never ride, for all cars in Khatmandu (and there were several hundred, as we later learned) were the possessions of the royal families only. The common man was forbidden this symbol of prestige.

The trees thinned as we approached the pass. The rain flattened the poor grass that had barely squeezed through the viscous clay. Occasionally we would see—but far from the track—a hut built of the same clay, red half-way up its walls, then painted white to the eaves. A lovely child, a girl with brass ear-rings the size of saucers, flitted like a nymph from tree to tree before us for quite a long while, smiling and disappearing again. An old woman materialized as mysteriously as the girl—all Nepal must have somehow known that we were coming—and snarled into each dandy as it passed, holding her hands cupped for alms. The last one in line was Jack's empty, but she

pursued it through the treacherous mud with outstretched hands until she realized her errand was hopeless. She must have been in India at one time, and have known white sahibs, for she was the only true beggar we met in Nepal. The *saddhus*, the holy men, were exceptions, of course; they begged for reasons which might be to us obscure but were to them divine.

The track was almost perpendicular now. We were near the pass and I felt exultant that soon I should look down upon the valley which had been my dream of Utopia since I was a child. Just now there was scarcely light enough for proper exposure, but the scene was so dramatic—with our coolies and their burdens like parading ghouls, the mysterious palanquins swaying amidst them as if carrying souls to hell—that we attempted one final shot with the lenses wide at f.2. The grade was so steep that there was a difference of nearly a yard in the height of the front and rear tripod legs.

"Ready?" Armand called.

"All right, come ahead."

Roy had started to crank—he claimed he never could get the "feel" of a motor-driven camera—when an apparition came downhill past our view-finders, a boy coolie, as grey of face as the fog, carrying a behemoth of a woman upon his back. She rode facing backwards in a basket which was suspended by rope straps looping the boy's shoulders and forehead. After that we had no further qualms about shooting the dandies.

They came careening up to us, the porters dragging themselves along with their free hands seeking a grip upon the rocks, faltering, groping, falling against cruel flint. Armand winced when they went down, but we had to film it. It was a heartless land and must be heartlessly filmed if our document were to be of value at all.

The last stretch of trail was a continuous zigzag of slime and rocks that came rushing upon us whenever we touched them. I crept on all fours. I embraced the trees like brothers and passed from trunk to trunk. Ten feet gained. Twenty-five. The

ground was flattening. I could almost walk erect, unaided. Then I suddenly reached level earth, and saw the mountain slope down in front of me, the Chandraghiri pass. I stared. There below lay the valley of Nepal and legendary Khatmandu. Fog filled it. There lay the last home of mystery—a perfect blank.

Our coolies were restless. They were on the home stretch now and seemed panic-stricken that the delays caused by our photography would bring them to Khatmandu after dark. We were urged into the dandies again so that they could make greater speed and started down the mountain at a pace that chattered my teeth like castanets. An icy wind whipped over the Himalayas and whirled the fog around us in great clots; the wind blew harder, steadily from the north, until suddenly, though for less than a minute, the valley shone clear below us, a lambent jewel-box of a country touched by the last light of the sun.

I had scarcely a gasp left in me, but I gasped now at the beauty of this amazing secret place, as remote as hell, or heaven, from the travels of Europeans. In all history less than two hundred white men had been permitted the view we had before us, of range upon range of the snow-capped Himalayas cupping a valley only fifteen miles long by about thirteen wide but inviolate as no other spot in the world, with the exception of Lhasa itself, will ever be. In early days the valley was called Nag Hrad, the Tank of the Serpent, and it is geologically evident that at one time it must have been a lake. The Buddhists credit Manjusri and the Hindus Vishnu with cleaving the mountain to drain the lake down the river now known as the Baghmatti.

Four thousand feet below us and four thousand five hundred feet above sea-level lay this enchanted place, its three major cities gleaming where the shadows had not yet reached the palaces of marble and the temple roofs of gold. There was Khatmandu, whose very name was awesome, and Bhatgaon, Kirtipur, Patan, jewelled miniature cities snug in the folds of green velour. The valley to the west was twisted, hummocked, hacked in fantastic shapes, the result of ancient

erosion, and to the east rose tier upon tier of terracing, a swirling flight of steps growing gradually fainter and tighter together as they climbed the mountains.

"Look," Leila said, but when I turned to look in the direction she was pointing that whole half of the valley was almost instantly obliterated by a mass of fog, a rolling avalanche that seemed propelled by the million spikes of rain behind it. The opposite mountains disappeared. Even the trees a few yards ahead of us wavered indistinctly like things seen through someone else's glasses. The fog darkened, the trees vanished. The sun had set in this moment and the world was suddenly black. A terrible cry of fear went up from our sixty coolies. The demons would get them now. We lighted flashlights and Armand harangued them in a language they could not understand but which must have frightened them more than the demons, for they picked us up again and continued down the mountain at a frantic trot. The rain came at us like birdshot, tearing at our faces and hands. Even with my eyes closed my eyeballs ached from the beating of it. A huge flare of lightning showed the terrible descent before us. Thunder crashed and reverberated, echoing among glacial mountains that were five miles high, and with each burst of it the coolies would cry desperately, "*Narain-ah! Narain-ah!*" calling out to their god Narain to preserve them. And again when we overtook an old man who bore a frightened calf in the basket on his back they called to him, "*Ah naheen ah!*" to exorcise him if he should be a ghost.

There was no stopping them now. We could see lights in the rain ahead: Tauncot, the first village of the valley. Our track became a road. Voices called to us. We jogged jauntily through the village, the coolies shouting greetings to their friends with the news, probably, that they had brought the weirdest collection of pale bipeds that any of them had ever seen. The rain propitiously slackened while we crossed this comfortable but perfectly dull country that was the valley floor. An automobile zoomed directly at us, passed by with an inch to spare. The lights were on inside it, and there I could see three men with jewelled turbans pretending that

they weren't looking at us at all. The car zoomed back and disappeared ahead, but for a minute only. Again it came full speed along that abominable road and past my dandy with several millimetres to spare. My coolies jumped and said never a word, but I made sounds which would be intelligible to any pale biped and flashed my powerful torch upon the retreating car. It was painted gold, entirely gold, even to the spare tyre on the back. Some royal emissary had come to inspect us, I supposed. Then for the last time it shot past towards the heart of Khatmandu.

Our headman sprinted to a guardhouse on the road and we plainly saw that he was telephoning, announcing our actual arrival, probably, to the Durbar and the Maharajah's men. The car and the telephone together, here in the midst of what is commonly called the "Himalayan fastnesses," made me fearful of finding a Hollywood Shangri-la. We stopped at the edge of Khatmandu, before a miniature palace surrounded by a high wall of concrete lattice, and debarked stiffly from the dandies amidst a horde of coolies who were all denouncing their headman as a thief, a cheat of their monies (we had not seen him since he telephoned). We paid them for the second time because we were too weary to argue and were wet and hungry and thick with leeches, and crowded through the gate. The guard slammed it. We had arrived. And we collapsed as well as one can upon straight chairs of chromium such as are found in hospital rooms.

"So this," said Leila, "is the heart of Asia. Exotic, what?" Armand closed his eyes before the horror of it all. I looked glumly at the green glass chandelier, the flowered linoleum rugs, the antimacassars on the backs of the chromium chairs. If we could have cried I think we would have done so. We went to bed without our supper.

## CHAPTER VIII

### KHATMANDU

It wasn't quite so bad in the morning when we arose to a sunlit day. We walked in the garden that surrounded the rest-house, waiting for some move of recognition from the Maharajah. The air was soft against our faces and the snow-peaked mountains seemed to reflect the sunlight blandly across the world.

Chand, returning from market, rushed up to Armand excitedly. "Subha, he come," he said. "Prepare!" He rushed to the kitchen quarters.

We were debating whether we should get out guns or drinks, when a natty young man followed his moustache into our garden. He wore the white leggings typical to Nepal, a grey tweed coat and a sort of black fez on which the national coat-of-arms—two crossed swords, a jewelled helmet, the soles of two bare feet, a seven pointed-star and a new moon—was embroidered in silver. Steel-rimmed glasses see-sawed across his nose.

He bowed to each one of us and shook our hands. The breath sizzled between his teeth as he held up a little card for us all to read: It said: OFFICER IN CHARGE OF HOSPITALITY DEPARTMENT, carefully lettered in red ink for this occasion.

This Subha—whatever that meant—bowed again.

"Sssso sssssorry," he sizzled. We never learned why he prefaced and concluded almost every statement with these words, unless it was that he was determined to oppose almost anything we wanted to do and so surrounded his veto with apologies.

As he had been in India and had some acquaintance with Europeans we felt he might understand our needs. Primary among them, of course, was to learn what great festivals, what large concourses of people, we might film. What cere-

monials might we foreigners visit? What might we find here that was indigenous and exclusive to Nepal? When were the usual pilgrimages from India and Tibet? When were the festivals of which we had heard, the Machendrajatra and the Dasehra with their travelling shrines and sacrifices, the Kaka Boli and Swana Boli devoted to the crow and the dog? What did the Subha suggest we should bring to the outer world from the beauty and wisdom of Nepal? When could we have an audience with the Maharajah?

Ah, he was so sorry, but all the festivals occurred at some other time. There was nothing now. Anyway, the Machendrajatra was just a party for the poor and ignorant people; the Dasehra—pooh!—was only for the soldiers. The very next festival would be what he termed the Ascension of the Maharajah, meaning the anniversary of his accession to power.

That was the keynote of all his information. He, as the Maharajah's personal representative, must at the same time exalt his master and persuade us that Nepal was not different from other countries, that it was modern, progressive, mechanized, for he knew that whatever we as writers and photographers thought picturesque in the country or exotically exciting would probably be a deplorable survival from ancient times. He and his Maharajah were ashamed of those very customs which we had travelled so many thousands of miles to record, excellent customs, many of them, which our grey modern world could well afford to emulate. We were convinced that the colour and active beauty of the East would be tonic to our own people. We believed sincerely that escape by way of films or written tales to a world more glamorous than ours and in many ways kindlier was salutary in itself, aside from being sociologically instructive. The horrors of the East must be noted as well as its blessings, in all honesty, and therefore we asked again of the Dasehra festival.

Leila had offered the Subha a cup of tea, but he had sizzingly refused: "Sssso sssssorry." A Brahman such as he would be corrupted by eating with us. When this tactical gesture failed us Armand came to the point at once.

"Now listen. Because it is important in your culture, as it is in that of India, we are also interested in the worship of Kali, Durga, Bhairavi, your goddesses of death, and we were told at Bhimpaphedi that the Daschra festival should occur while we are here. We were told that thousands of buffalo are sacrificed to Durga at that time, and that their meat is given to the poor—a very excellent idea," said Armand, holding his glasses to the sun and wiping them earnestly, a job which Leila usually attended to, for he never seemed to care whether they were clean or not so long as he could see through them at all. "This wonderful festival," said he, putting the glasses on again, "this festival should be preserved on film for posterity, don't you think, even more because now it has been reduced to scarcely more than a soldier's rite."

I marvelled at the several changes of diplomatic front which he had accomplished in a single paragraph, but the Subha was unimpressed by any of them. He just didn't reply, except to maintain that he was sorry.

Roy choked over his cup. "Tea leaf," he exclaimed, and hid his face in the cup again.

"Now look, Subha," I said gently, "you can at least tell us this. When do we get our equipment that came over the cableway? All our clothes are packed with it, you know. And when can we pay our respects to the Maharajah?"

He was looking hard at one of the biscuits which his religion forbade him to eat in our company. I pushed it towards him with an aseptic knife and he pocketed it, beaming.

"Highness," he said, "Highness ~~ssso~~ busy now. Eggwip-  
ment coming soon." He bowed and backed out of the door, down the garden path and out of the gate.

That again was that. We were being put in our places. Highness, as the Subha called him, who had invited us to Nepal in the name of his daughter and Leila's cousin, Franklin Roosevelt, would have us know who was master here; not a thing would we see or do without his authorization via that ferret of a Subha.

"I suppose we can walk around anyway," Leila said. But if it had not been that Armand towered grimly over the muzzle

of the gun on the shoulder of the soldier who guarded our gate, shrinking him even further with a look, we probably would have remained prisoners in the compound all day.

With that step through the wall we reached Khatmandu and a world of fantasy such as even my dreams had not enjoyed. It began with the miracle of telephone wires in that lost valley and it ended with blood for the gods. In between was a mincemeat of wonders, of shrines and temples and palaces, of humble dwellings so exquisitely proportioned and splendidly carved that our western cities seemed, for a moment, impossible to live in again. In Khatmandu, as throughout Nepal, there are actually more shrines and temples than houses, for it is believed that life in this world is only transitory and the world itself but a sort of tourist camp where man rests awhile before attaining a permanent Hereafter. It is therefore of greater importance for him to build for the gods than for himself; in a climate as equable as that of the valley there is little need anyway for elaborate dwellings, unless, of course, you are a Brahman of the royal family, semi-godly in consequence, and so must build temples unto yourself.

Everywhere were the eyes of Nepal, Buddha's eyes, painted on the shop fronts to watch for marauders, carved in the flagstones of the street. The swarming crowds of market goers took good care not to step on these; they eddied around them, and on none did I see a single splotch of the betel nut spit which made a red horror of the paving elsewhere. Armand made his way through the crowd to me, and said quietly,

"Buddha isn't the only one who is keeping his eye on us, and I don't mean these people either. Turn slowly, then take a quick look down the alley to your right. Heh? Isn't that he?"

It was. It was Hospitality Subha, half concealed behind an orange idol of Ganesh, the elephant god. He was busily writing in a notebook.

"This is going to be just dandy," Armand muttered, "if every move we make is spied upon. Maybe it's only coincidence, but I doubt it. Let's see if we can throw him off the track."

But in a moment we saw the utter impossibility of this, for where we went the crowd went, dozens of them that soon grew to hundreds milling about to view the odd creatures which the Maharajah had flung into their midst. The movement of the crowd was our movement, plain to see several blocks away, and easily apparent even above the heads of the Nepalese were Armand's high head and shoulders. It was impossible to conceal him.

We slid through a slot of an alley, greased by the bodies surrounding us. On one side were trestles supporting skeins of yarn a hundred feet long. Two old women with gold earrings the size and shape of highball glass coasters were reeling the yarn, but they stopped in such amazement that they could make no objection when the crowd became entangled in their yarn and overturned their trestles.

Through this alley we reached eventually the Durbar Square of which rumour and the few odd books on Nepal had reported such wonderful tales. It was a medley of colour, a riot of Oriental architecture, of pagoda roofs rising tier upon tier, of giant stone staircases which not even Armand could climb, even if he were permitted on them. The square itself is small with many streets radiating from it to the other *tols* or squares which are found shadowed by temples in every part of this labyrinthine city. Opposite us was the Taleju temple, dedicated to Tulaja Devi, the protectress of the Maharajah's house. Legend has it that Prithwi Narayan, the Gurkha conqueror of Khatmandu, once offered a human sacrifice in this temple, and was that same night visited in a dream by Tulaja Devi who expressed to him her disapproval. And in the morning he was visited by ravening hordes of lice, which so clinched the matter that he never offered human sacrifice again.

The Hanuman Dhoka, the gate of the monkey god, came into view as I turned a corner. The great god Hanuman sat beside it upon a pedestal, swathed in dirty linen and further protected from the sun by a parasol that was stuck into the back of his neck. His face was scarcely recognizable, it was so smeared with vermillion and *ghee*, the native buffalo butter;

it was simply a red blob, inexpressibly evil by the very fact that it was featureless. Two lions, laughing, guarded him and his golden gate.

Beauty and horror were jumbled together everywhere. The serene face of Buddha would be flanked by leering griffins; the exquisite door to a temple of Kali would have oozing from beneath it the blood of the goat we had heard bleating a few minutes ago.

We headed for a huge edifice in the centre of the square. There stood the most monstrous and hideous image that the fearful mind of man could conceive, the idol Khal Bhairab, goddess of terror and death. Forty feet high stood this appalling creature of red and black and orange masonry, folding two hands over her breast, waving a spear and a fire-brand with two others and trampling upon the head of a very contented-looking demon. Across her forehead was strung a row of human skulls, and great pendants of them encircled her neck.

It was no longer difficult to believe the reports of British officials who had been Government Residents at Khatmandu, preposterous as they at first had seemed. I could well believe that during the great Dasehra festival and at various other religious orgies the feet of ghoulish goddesses were awash with blood. I could believe, and I was later to confirm, the story of thousands of buffalo sacrificially decapitated, within a period of two or three days only, of little Gurkhas whisking off the heads of the beasts with a single slash of the *kukri* until the earth became a lake of living blood. Preposterous? Yes, 'but it was true, as so much that is true of Nepal must seem preposterous to the outside world.'

We waited. Each morning we waited for Hospitality to bring us word that his Highness would receive us at last. The five of us would sit wondering how the devil we ever would get a film if we never could get the express permission of the Maharajah to begin working.

"If something doesn't happen," Armand growled, "in the next couple of days, we'd better pack up and leave. What

have we seen so far? Scenery. Magnificent scenery. Architecture. Idols. We're supposed to be making a *moving* picture, aren't we?"

There was a commotion in the street beyond our garden wall, and when we reached the yard we saw at last the Maharajah. Beyond the wall passed the head and shoulders of one of the royal elephants, and sedately perched upon it, looking straight ahead, was the Maharajah, "Highness" himself, looking like anyone's grandfather in his perfectly tailored European clothes. I had somehow expected that he would be darker of skin than he was; there was neither the chocolate warmth to it of the Hindu complexion, nor the yellow of the Mongol. The Maharajah, like most of his family, was nearly of our own colouring.

He passed from view, and we returned to our contemplations.

Armand had written immediately upon our arrival to the one white man, the British Resident, who was allowed to reside with his staff in Khatmandu. He had asked him for tea and cocktails with us. His note in reply seemed rather odd: "Sorry. Can't manage that. Come for dinner with me and I'll explain."

We went in the evening to visit the loneliest man in the world, Colonel Rand, and his charming wife. Their Residency was indeed an "outpost of Empire," a beamed and bricked and ivied English country house in a land which owed no allegiance to England and wanted none. As we entered the living-room Mrs. Rand rose from a table by a window where the great Himalayas were framed, a vivid and vital woman smiling at us with a welcome which could not have been more eager had we been her own family returning. In her hand she held the last piece of an immense picture puzzle which covered the card table. Outside were the Himalayas, majestic, terrible, and here on her table, composed of a thousand tiny pieces, was the rural scene from her own land which she had laboriously assembled.

"It passes the time," she said. Yes, it passed the time, but not quickly enough. She and her husband had been here three years already, completely isolated from their own kind

and they would be here two years more before they could go on leave. Colonel Rand, military in bearing, asked us what we would have to drink. As he crossed the room he put the last piece of the picture puzzle into place.

"We get them large, so they will last," he said. "You know, at a post like this, although it is in many ways fascinating, there now and again comes a moment when you are inclined to believe in the Hindu notion of a perpetual flow of time, of life merging into life through various incarnations. If it weren't for Dorothy's reassurance I couldn't say for certain how long I have been here, or whether I'm the same man who came out long ago. We must listen to the news later on."

I thought of the various consuls and official residents I had met in out-of-the-way places, in Tahiti, Fiji, Borneo, Algeria. Colonel Rand's task was surely the loneliest of them all.

"I'll tell you with no false modesty that it's a delicate job," he was saying. "The Maharajah runs all of Nepal like a private estate, feudally, and a Resident is here on sufferance only. Believe me or not, I actually am forbidden to visit the very few foreigners who come to this country; they, like yourselves, must come to me here, but only after I have received permission from his Highness to receive them. I've never learned why, but that's the edict and I stick to it. Believe me or not again, I have never been more than twelve miles in any direction from this Residency. It's just not permitted."

"Good Heavens, why?"

He shrugged his shoulders. He was the perfect representative of the British Empire, capable, courageous, loyal not only to his own land, but, in so far as possible, to his adopted one. There were matters here, he implied, which it wouldn't be cricket to discuss.

He changed the subject tactfully when he saw Armand, tactfully also, examining a row of portraits of the various Maharajahs who had literally owned and operated Nepal since the year 1846, when that most brilliant ruler, Jang Bahadur, put an end to the warring factions and consolidated the country.

"You know, of course, that there is a King of Nepal as well

as the Maharajah, and that the Maharajah is properly the Prime Minister. The King, whose real title is Maharaj Adhiraj, is just a puppet, while the Prime Minister, or Maharajah, has almost autocratic powers. The entire national revenue passes through his hands. There is no doubt that he is one of the wealthiest men in the world, and perhaps one of the wisest, to maintain his kingdom inviolate from foreign influence. Yet he is making every effort to industrialize the country. The exports increase yearly."

One of the bearded buccaneers who passed for houseboys announced in Hindustani that dinner was served. Appareled in white jacket and scarlet turban with the Nepalese coat-of-arms upon it, I might easily have taken him for a lesser prince.

It would be but a simple family dinner, said Mrs. Rand; she hadn't known we were in Nepal. But tall candles illumined it; the linen was glossy and good to touch; the wine was the best of France, a rare Pouilly; and the steak! Ah, but that steak was good after our diet upon the cellulose chicken of the country! After the rice and the rice and the rice!

I beamed at the Rands in their snug lost world. We all beamed, while the Colonel, slowly revolving his wine glass, told us something of the odd history of Nepal.

"The prehistoric legends you can skip," he said. "They are full of gods and sacred serpents and kings descended from one or the other or both, the usual *mélange* you find in the work of all Oriental historians who seek a divine ancestry and embellish it with heroic fiction. The first recorded incident of any importance was the visit of Buddha around 450 B.C. He was born on the edge of Nepal, you know, and when he visited the valley to make a tour of the many great Hindu shrines he won over a thousand proselytes to his own new religion, weaning them from Hinduism as shrewdly as one political party leader seduces disciples from the opposition.

"Then around 250 B.C. there came Asoka, Emperor of northern India, ostensibly on a Buddhist pilgrimage, for he was a most pious fellow. He erected monuments which are still standing in various parts of the valley, married off his daughter to a Nepalese aristocrat and deftly sneaked the throne from

beneath the corpulent body of a king whose marvellous name was Stunko.

"The history of the next eight centuries is vague. We know that various princes of India extended their conquests in Nepal, but at what periods and to what extent we are not very clear. We have the record, however, of that amazing Chinese traveller, Hiuen Tsang, who somehow got to Nepal about A.D. 637, stating that the Hindus were in full possession at that time. Wait, I'll read you what your ancient colleague in exploration has to say."

Colonel Rand excused himself and shortly returned to the table with a large brown morocco volume under his arm. "Forgive me, Dorothy. Bad manners, I know." His wife smiled at Leila, sharing the strange knowledge that men just never would grow up.

"The Kingdom of Nepal," he writes, and this is thirteen centuries ago, mind you, "is in the middle of snowy mountains. Its soil abounds in fruit and flowers and the climate is cold. The inhabitants are of a hard nature, and neither good faith nor justice appeals to them, but they are gifted with a very considerable skill in the arts. . . . The houses are of wood, painted and sculptured; the people are fond of bathing, of dramatic representations of astrology, and bloody sacrifices. . . . Irrigation—practically and scientifically applied—makes the soil of great value. Buddhism and Brahmanism flourish in the principal temples, which are wealthy and well supported. Numerous monasteries shelter the Buddhist priests. Commerce prospers, and trade is well organized and directed."

"Pretty sharp old fellow, wasn't he? There's a biography someone should write. Imagine him, at that period, crossing China, crossing the wild plateaux of Tibet, and then, trekking over the Kuti Pass of the Himalayas, twenty thousand feet up, and down into this completely unknown land? Why, he makes Marco Polo look like a Sunday excursionist! And remember that Hiuen Tsang, in the year 637, didn't have half the modern travel conveniences of Marco, six hundred years later!"

We laughed. We were pretty soft adventurers compared with those of a millennium and more ago.

"Well, there next came a period when Nepal declined to scarcely more than a vassal state of Tibet. Then there was a period of about six hundred years when the Thakurs and the Mallas, the 'wrestler kings,' alternately devastated and re-organized the country, until the almost omnipotent Prithwi Narayan, King of the Gurkha tribes, commenced the terrible four years' war which resulted in complete subjugation of Nepal. It has remained under Gurkha dominion ever since. You have heard of Kirtipur, the City of Cut Noses? It was during that campaign that the beleagured people first asked aid from the British, and as there was considerable trade at the time between Nepal and India, or enough to seem worth while retaining, the British Government sent a small force under Captain Kinloch. But it was the rainy season, the streams were swollen, malaria took a frightful toll of his men, and the Captain decided finally to retire while he could before he should be shut off from his provisions. It wasn't a very doughty achievement for the British Army, I should say.

"Nor did our next expeditions to Nepal do anything to elevate our prestige. In 1792 we made a commercial treaty with the King. In 1814 we declared war upon the Nepalese because for some years they had been seizing villages which encroached upon our Indian frontier; they had seized territory in Ramnagar and murdered the police of Batoli. One after another, Generals Gillespie, Martindell, Wood, and Marley led forces of picked men through the Terai and over the mountains, fighting constantly against forces of tiny Gurkhas which in no case amounted to a quarter their number. Yet in hand-to-hand fighting the Gurkhas won almost every battle in the mountains. But after two years of fighting General Ochterlony finally out-maneuvred the by now exhausted Nepalese. The Treaty of Segowli was signed and a British Resident sent to Khatmandu.

"After this there was a period of petticoat rule in Nepal, of imbecile sovereigns and wholesale murder, and when a general massacre of thirty-one of the most influential chiefs occurred there rose to the post of Prime Minister that amazing soldier, Jang Bahadur. He became the actual ruler of the country;

the King was exiled. He tried once to regain the throne, was defeated, and ended his days chained in a pit at Bhatgaon. From that time to this Nepal has been ruled by Prime Ministers, descendants of Jang Bahadur. The law of succession is curious; the office always falls to the eldest surviving male relative, son, brother, or first cousin. There is a king, as I have said, but he is a figurehead only."

Leila said, "Weren't the Nepalese engaged in the 1914 War?"

"Indeed they were. During the first year of the war the Maharajah offered aid to England, a splendid gesture of friendship since he was under no obligation whatsoever to do so, nor did he need to curry favour with us at that time. Between 1914 and 1918 he contributed over a million rupees and vast quantities of materials: cardamons, tea, clothing, *sal* wood. And two hundred thousand Gurkhas, approximately one-quarter of the male population of Nepal, joined our service, some on the North-west Frontier, some in the United Provinces, and quite a number on the Western Front. They fought superbly, those little men, not so much with the gun as with the terrible *kukri*. I've seen a Hun split open from scalp to pelvis by a five-foot Gurkha with a two-foot blade."

The evening passed delightfully. We wallowed in comfort and hung upon the words of these intelligent and gracious people. It is to them that I largely owe whatever information I here set down regarding the world's least publicized land, Nepal. To them and to the young man, Thapa, whom we had met on the toy railway crossing the Terai and were soon to meet again.

The Rands wished us good night upon the broad stone steps of the Residency. There was a car in the drive, an ancient vehicle, a Dodge, which looked slightly familiar.

"Why, that's the car," Armand exclaimed, "that we saw being carried over the mountains!"

"Certainly it is," the Colonel replied. "It is at your disposal. His Highness's secretary 'phoned half an hour ago, saying something to the effect that since you thought so highly of it as to photograph it at length, perhaps you would enjoy

using it while you are in the valley. It is to be a gift to His Highness's niece, a girl about fifteen years old who is just learning to drive and has already cracked up three good cars. So her wise uncle has imported this antique for her. It is yours, however," he said with a crooked smile, "until His Highness decides that you are to leave."

We were doubly surprised when upon climbing into the car our chauffeur grinned at us. It was Thapa, the pessimistic youth we had met on the train. He had disheartened us then, but soon we were to find him invaluable, for he had considerable intelligence, a fair knowledge of English, and a very sensible aversion to our warder, Hospitality.

In that mile from the Residency to the rest-house our car was stopped six times by armed guards who would emerge suddenly from their little kiosks, shove their rifles menacingly at our radiator and demand to see Thapa's pass. There is a curfew in Khatmandu at eleven o'clock, and none may be out at that hour without a special permit. The guards were everywhere, in the obscurest lanes, in the bazaars, disconcertingly before our own house, but what they were on guard against I never could learn. Nepal had been at peace with itself for many years; invasion was almost impossible as the British learned during their several campaigns; yet here was a standing army of forty-five thousand troops, regularly drilling, continually watchful by night and day. The army, it seemed, now served little purpose except as the hobby of the Maharajah, a vastly expensive one which left insufficient funds for other and more essential services of the state.

We reached the rest-house at midnight and the guard passed us grudgingly. Thapa bowed low.

"Good Morrow," he said.

Day after day slid down the glacial mountains on the east of the valley and up the mountains of the west. The sun blessed us. Here was the fullest peace, so much of it indeed that we were not once disturbed by an invitation to visit His Highness, the Maharajah. He sent us, with never a message, great salvers of fruit and vegetables, haunches of venison which

he himself had shot, said Hospitality, and on one occasion six dozen eggs. These eggs passed the entire morning for Chand, our warrior cook. For hours he sat breaking them into a little bowl, grunting at each and spitting on each and finally flinging it over his shoulder to the mongoose which, when it could no longer swallow, delighted in smearing the yolks on the outside of his muzzle as if somehow he might absorb them through his skin. Egg after egg went sailing, until Leila, came horrified, into the yard.

"Maharajah eggs all bad!" said Chand. Zoom, went another one.

We appreciated the thoughtfulness of the Maharajah, particularly regarding the venison which was the only good meat, excepting Colonel Rand's steak, we had eaten in a very long time. But if His Highness was shooting deer these days he was certainly not tending to business so strictly that he could find no time for us. We decided to start filming anyway, to get what we could of background shots so long as we were not explicitly forbidden to do so. Let Hospitality write us up in his scandal book; let Thapa groan at the thought of the punishments that would afflict us all, we none the less had a film to make, a perfectly respectable and serious record of Nepal. On our own heads be it.

So Thapa groaned across the wheel of the ancient Dodge with Jack beside him. In the back squeezed Armand, Leila, Roy, Hospitality, and myself plus the most essential assortment of moving picture apparatus.

We crossed a modern steel bridge on the sacred Baghmatti River. Ahead of us lay the *maidan*, the immense parade ground, with a thousand troops vigorously drilling. They were smart little fellows in their natty brown uniforms and jaunty cloth hats; the Gurkha, I thought, has the qualities of the mongoose; he is as quick, as spontaneously friendly, as deadly as that small prince of civets. The greatest fighting men in Asia, they were reputed to be.

We drove slowly round the *maidan*, admiring the accoutrements of the Nepalese officers. They were dressed in scarlet and sat upon tiger skins, and from their helmets waved Bird of

Paradise feathers which had been brought from Borneo three thousand miles away. Whenever they paused to review the troops a corps of coolies rushed forward with whisks, and squatted to swish the flies from their horses' bellies.

Beyond the *maidan* stood the palaces of the Maharajah's sons and grandsons, square white edifices of marble, utterly unsplendid. And beyond these was the Singa Durbar, the palace of the Maharajah, impressive by its size alone rather than any architectural beauty. A high iron fence surrounded its gardens and ponds and fountains. The palace, white and supine, lay across the centre of the twenty-acre space; to the right were stables and to the left the private zoo in which were housed whatever animals of the chase His Highness had wounded and not killed. There, said Hospitality, lived the Royal Rhinoceros which must be killed at the exact moment of the Maharajah's death.

That seemed to be rubbing it in a bit, I thought, considering that the Maharajah had reputedly killed forty-seven rhino (and one hundred and thirty-five tiger) during a three months' hunt last year.

We drove west, over undulating fields of corn, to the small village of Thini. There was only a single street of it, running up and over a hill, walled on both sides by two- and three-storey houses of the lovely old Newar form: low eaves, long struts of symbolic carving, latticed windows of perfect proportion, unlike any others in the world. The usual bright brass pots shone in the shops beneath them, and loops of material block-printed black or red in a great variety of patterns.

Roy, Jack, and I debarked to get a shot of Armand and Leila riding up the street in the ancient Dodge, but at that moment it began to drizzle. Roy waved a handkerchief to Thapa to signify that the camera was ready. I crouched beneath his tripod with the Ikonta suspended by its strap from my teeth while with one hand I held up the light meter and with the other threatened Hell to the curious crowd that clogged our scene. It rained, and up went a hundred umbrellas, obliterating what little light was left, adding another darkness to our patient film.

It was not polite, of course, as their guests, to shout at them, but shout we did, even Hospitality with an apologetic and decently Brahman shout. It did no good. They began to imitate us. More and more umbrellas went up until I, fumbled for the kazoo and jumped away tootling "The Jolly Old King of England" upon it. I blew and blew, and the umbrellas surged after me, leaving the cameras to follow the madman down the long Thini street. It was a ruse we should employ often thereafter.

Soon we were jammed breathless into the car and driving through sun again. Markets appeared in the most unlikely places, in the midst of an open field where old men sat cross-legged selling red onions beneath oiled-paper parasols painted with dragons. Holy yogis limped slowly down the road, raising twisted fingers as we jolted past them. They were begging, said Hospitality, for "rice, *pice* or anything nice".

We circled Khatmandu by an abominable road. We were going to Bhatgaon, said Hospitality, Bhatgaon the Golden City that had fired my young imagination when I had first read Father Giuseppe's *Researches*. My heart beat faster, for great dreams too rarely come true, but it fails me now in seeking to describe that strangest and loveliest city in the world.

You come upon it gradually, through a scattering of houses, past the huge tank called Siddha Pokri, three hundred yards long and one hundred wide, which was built in the seventeenth century during the reign of Bhim Sen and stocked by him with goldfish imported from China across Tibet and the four-mile-high passes of the Himalayas—the hardiest fish in the world, they must be, to endure such a journey. The people of Bhatgaon believe that their city resembles the conch shell of Vishnu Narayan, the rounded and broader end lying towards the north-east and its point south-west. It is smaller than the other two cities of the vale, Khatmandu and Patan, but its streets are wider and cleaner and its buildings far better preserved, for at the time of the Gurkha conquest Bhatgaon was surrendered without resistance to Prithwi Narayan and consequently escaped the plunder which those other cities experienced at the hands of the invaders.

You pass the tank, and the streets dwindle for a while funnelling towards the Durbar Square. Balconies of superb grill-work carve the sunlight into kaleidoscopic patterns where it strikes the flagstone streets. Lattice windows wearing carved peacocks flank you to right and to left. You pass through wooden colonnades, rich red in tone, through carved gateways with emblems of Siva upon their tops. Griffins of green stone drowse before many doorways, and above them, one on each side to warn off marauders, are painted the eyes of Buddha, the vigilant eyes of Nepal.

Bhatgaon's Durbar Square seems an architectural bedlam when suddenly you emerge from the half-shadowed streets and are confronted by it, a hundred gilded roofs, tier upon tier, flinging spots of sun like golden coins at your eyes, a score of temples so closely packed that it is hard to tell the limits of the square. Somewhere near the centre on a twenty-foot cube of stone is a stupendous bell, suspended between granite columns from a granite beam, and overlooking this, on a great pillar surmounted by a lotus of stone, sits the magnificent figure of Rajah Bhupatindra Mall, the greatest of Bhatgaon's rulers two hundred years ago.

Serene and arrogant, clothed entirely in gold plate, Bhupatindra Mall looks over the finest building of his reign, the Durbar Hall with its gilt-copper door. It is intricately embossed with a myriad designs from both Hindu and Buddhist lore, dragons, twisted lizards, cherubim with tails, lions rampant, elephants, gods and goddesses with innumerable arms. Scriptures in Sanscrit are woven between these figures, admonishing the faithful and calling his attention to some of the minute but monstrous creatures that are bound to get him if he won't watch out. The smallest design is significant to the initiate, a scroll, a leaf, a bell; each has its esoteric implication, and here of course are the eyes of Buddha benevolent and baleful both.

But although the Buddhist elements of Bhatgaon are immediately obvious, they are rapidly dying before the encroachment of the fierce Hindu cults. Most of the Newar populace is Hindu, and their temples outnumber by three to one the graceful pagodas of Buddhism.

In the Taumari Tol square is the pagoda known as the Nyatpola Deval, or the Temple of the Five Stages, for it stands on five terraces penetrated by a flight of enormous steps. Gigantic figures, carved in stone and coloured, stand on each side of the stairway; first two enormous, moustachioed wrestlers, then two elephants on the step above, then two lions. Two griffins look over the heads of these, and on the top step, guarding the temple so ferociously that I should think twice about entering, even were I permitted, are the deities Singhini and Vyaghini, the most powerful of all these Bhairavis, these "Terribles," as they are called. Though Singhini and Vyaghini are supposed to be great enemies of the demons of evil, the temple they guard was originally planned as a shrine for the Tantric order. It is recorded that at the time of its founding, in A.D. 1700, the king himself brought three bricks for it, as an example to his people, and this act so stimulated the citizens of Bhatgaon that in five days all the materials needed for its construction were heaped upon the spot. Then the gods lent a hand and in five days more the temple was finished. The gods worked diligently by day, but at night their revels were so flagrant and debauched that even their Tantric worshippers were frightened to observe such evil, and would not worship there. The temple has remained unoccupied ever since.

Wonder is heaped upon wonder in Bhatgaon. The Golden Door is astonishing, the pillar of Bhupatindra Mall breathtaking by its clean and fantastic beauty, the Tantric temples admirable and appalling; but it is the temple of Bhavani, of the Buddhist Heavens, that makes you despair of cameras and colour film. A long-shot of it will show the magnificent brazen dragons guarding the entrance, the twin lotus pillars with gilt lions atop them, each holding a double flaming banner of burnished gold, a great bronze bell which a pilgrim is ringing, perhaps, before she makes her offering of rice and flowers at the shrine. A holy *saddhu* sits cross-legged before it, his beard reaching to the ground and his arms held skywards paralysed, emaciated, for he had held them in this position for many years as proof of his piety.



The gold statue of Bhupatindra Mall



Narain, the God of the Miracle, floating in his bed of serpents

But the long-shot will not show you the astounding details of the building, the frieze of strange beasts' heads, the golden façade with its intertwined patterns of religious symbols, nor the beauty of the windows which instead of being latticed with wood are grilled in flower patterns of strips of metal gilt. A close-up will miss the majesty of the whole and neither one shot nor the other will record the odour of grease, vermillion, incense, cow's urine, exuding from the slime which the devout have rubbed upon the shrine itself until it is almost completely obscured.

As we walked around this fabulous city, filming the crowds of pilgrims, of traders, of holy men against a background of architectural miracle and natural magnificence—for the Himalayas raised their snow peaks above it all—we glimpsed occasionally the inner life of Bhatgaon through a half-open doorway leading to a court where stone gods were clustered and the families living on the court were making their private offerings. We were forbidden here. I should gladly have taken off my shoes or crept on bended knees in pure worship of such mystery and beauty, but I was waved gently away. I was apart from this, a follower of an arid faith, a foreigner, unclean.

A whimsical sheep-herder from Tibet looked up at me and made noises of condolence, for he was a wanderer too, having come over the hostile mountains with all his trade goods strapped on the backs of his sheep. Four long-haired beggars danced around me, singing. A Gurkha soldier winked as he passed me, and whistled, of all incredible tunes, "Tipperary," for he had been in the first world war. Armand and Leila called that it was time for lunch.

"Let it be known," said Armand, swatting a fly with one of Ram's rubber pancakes, "that we wish to see the best dancers of Nepal. All of them." He fixed Hospitality with a glare that meant he would brook no further nonsense. "And let them assemble here, in our own yard, to-morrow, not later. If they have pressure, like High Highness, tell them that we have rupees."

Hospitality said only "Sssssss . . . , " but to-morrow our dancers came, hundreds of them, crowding into our walled garden until there was scarcely space for ourselves. All were masked and costumed to represent the fiends of their exotic pantheon. Some of the masks were wood, some papiermâché, some were ragged cloths with a single eye and a round mouth. Some were upside-down with beards growing over their foreheads and eyes where their mouths should be, and some had semi-precious stones suspended from their hair.

Their musicians followed them with a weird collection of instruments, flat drums like dishpans, long drums of giant bamboo, horns, bells, kidney-shaped violins. And as the dancers leaped crazily into the yard so did the musicians burst into a frenzy of music that nearly split my skull with its din. Perhaps there was rhythm to it and musical design, but it seemed that each man of them was playing independently in a vicious effort to drown out the others.

All morning they danced while we wandered among them, choosing the best of the lot for performance and costume. The garden wall was covered with onlookers who kept up a continuous circling as they were pursued by a tiny policeman with a switch. He was an inefficient switcher, for he carried a strange pair of English brogues in one hand and they seemed so heavy that he was always on the point of being dragged by them off the wall. Still he switched eagerly and made the most hideous high-pitched sounds which we could hear even above the babel of music.

"We've got eighteen," said Armand. "That's enough. You tell them, Thapa, to come here three weeks from to-day, twenty-one days from to-day." He gave each man a slip of paper signed with his name, so that none but those we had chosen would return. The others we pushed out bodily with the help of the policeman who beat them with his shoes.

But one old man refused to budge, a little fellow with ugly, small, plump hands, a minor Lama, Hospitality explained, sent by the Maharajah "as a gift". He would do the ritual hand gestures of Lamaism for us, a signal honour. We were

not impressed, but as it was unwise to affront His Highness by rejecting the gift, and as moving picture film was too precious to waste, Armand sent me off with him and Thapa to make a few still photographs.

"French film," Armand advised me, "unless he's much more charming than he looks." "French film" is no film at all. The suggestion of using it, common to all moving picture producers, means only that an empty camera should be cranked at those whom it is impolitic to offend. French film is the social mainstay of any expedition.

We drove off into a drizzling rain, Thapa and the Lama and I, waving good-bye to Hospitality who by now was completely baffled as to where his duties lay, whether with the four-fifths of the expedition who were going to sit at home and work on notes for the commentary of the film, or with the fifth member who unquestionably was driving away to forbidden territory with the Maharajah's gift.

I had the poor grace not to hold the hand of the gift when I flung my arm across the back of the front seat and he clutched at it, but I smiled pleasantly. And then my chauffeur, Thapa, said convincingly an extraordinary thing. The Lama, he said, was one hundred and thirty years old.

I looked back at the man. He was bland and brown and unlined. One hundred and thirty years old, Thapa repeated. He was present in 1846 at the massacre of Gagan Singh and the King's ministers. He was present twenty years earlier at a festival dedicated to Bhairab during which the priests slashed themselves with knives to the mad accompaniment of drums and flutes.

Yet he looked sixty at the most, and it was difficult to accept Thapa's exorbitant claim that he was indeed over a century old.

"Now the King," said Thapa, blowing his horn gently at a sacred cow in the road.

"What King?"

"The King of Nepal. There his palace," Thapa said.

Squat and glittering white it stood, like a hospital or a sanatorium. There was a bandstand in front, where musicians

would play to a king who slumped behind curtained windows.

"Once," said Thapa, "he wanted to be an athlete. Now at night sometimes you see him, one foot on one horse, one foot on other horse, galloping through the garden over flowers. But his head aches so he falls hard off".

Poor little king, with all in the world he could want, except a country to call his own. I can imagine no more tragic scene than that one in the garden, the king riding two great horses, heroic and free for the instant before he "falls hard off."

The Lama in the back seat leaned forward and stroked the neck of Thapa, who jumped as though a leech had settled on him. The Lama whispered and Thapa told me.

"He says go to Bodhinath, his temple of Tibet, where he will make hands at you."

About three miles to the east of Khatmandu rose the largest Buddhist temple in the country, the Bodhinath or Kashachait, one hundred and thirty-five feet high. We saw from a great distance the blue and white enamelled eyes on its spire, staring straight at us, daring us to swerve from Buddha's Golden Way. Nowhere else in the world are there temples such as this. Nowhere had I ever seen such an awesome religious edifice, so powerful in all its proportions, so vital in the effect produced by those colossal eyes. It is because of them, of course, that you feel the temple to be charged with a living faith, and not merely housing some quaint Oriental religion.

The Bodhinath is old beyond the records of Nepal, but it is believed to have been built over the tomb of an eminent Tibetan Lama named Kasha, who came on a pilgrimage from Lhasa, died, and was either cremated or interred at this spot. It is the magnet of all the great pilgrimages which occur during the winter months and is kept in repair by the authorities at Lhasa. The pilgrims clean away the weeds and moss with which it becomes covered during the rains, repaint the divine eyes on the four sides of the spiring *toran*, and mortar the minor fissures in the masonry.

The temple stands upon a square and very massive base which is composed of three broad terraces, rising one above

and within another. From the top terrace rises a concrete hemisphere ninety feet across. This is encircled by a series of niches, each containing a stone relief of Amitabha, the third Divine Buddha; there were hundreds of them, precisely alike, gazing serenely towards every part of Nepal. The square *toran* with the terrible eyes ascends from the hemisphere and supports a spire in the shape of a pyramid, the thirteen steps on each side of which are covered with plates of copper gilt. The crown of this stupendous monument which seems half temple and half the idol of a god, is for ever so freshly gilt that the reflection of the sun upon it can be seen like a heliograph for many miles. I have seen it by moonlight, a halo of gold floating over the sleeping town.

My Lama was whispering at me and beginning to weave his hands, for a fine drizzle had begun and he was eager to have his performance over with. But Thapa had a better idea. He led us around the temple, drawing his hand over the hundreds of prayer wheels set into its base as a child draws a stick along a picket fence. With the revolution of each a prayer for Thapa went up to Heaven. We made the circuit just as the rain came down in full force from the sturdy Himalayan clouds, and we ducked for shelter into one of the small *vihars*, or monasteries, which alternated with silversmiths' shops around the temple's flagged court.

I saw more hands, the corded and tapering hands of the Lama who officiated here. They were in the light and shadow cast by a lattice window upon them as they very slowly turned the pages, or rather the boards, of a wooden book. An old man he was, a priest of eighty, said Thapa quietly, and added that he would die before very long, for he had not followed the Way as had our gift Lama, who would live for ever, of course.

The walls of this small room were entirely painted with Buddhas, and in the centre of the floor was a golden eye. Vermilion grease for anointing the images hung in a pot like a witch's cauldron by the side of the great wooden book. Old prayer wheels, their prayers rubbed out by a thousand years of pilgrimage, were heaped in one corner. I wondered if it would be possible to buy one, but I am a poor business man;

I am shy of offending people or even their gods in which I do not believe. I was humbled by this saintly old man who kept his finger on a word of Sanscrit all the while we were there.

But our gift-Lama, who would live for ever, fondled my camera until I pulled out the roll of Panatomic film and replaced it with Super XX, for there was so little illumination through the rain-drenched window that the light metre gave no reading at all.

Quick as a wink the Lama snatched a brass bell from his colleague, a brass mitre with brass carlaps from a shelf, and commenced the ritual gestures. He minced and postured and lifted one ankle to the knee of the other leg, ringing the bell meanwhile, pointing to it, twisting his fingers in a manner that was horrible to watch and yet full of grace.

I had the feeling that those hands could do murder, that they could pull a serpent apart. They would join fingers lightly, slither back to back; a palm would pat an elbow, caress the bell, splay its fingers and suddenly make a circle with the forefinger and thumb so quickly and smoothly, gesture flowing into gesture, that I had to use a camera speed of one five-hundredth of a second to separate them.

All the while the old Lama was chanting, a weird litany which sounded like (*Shambu-nath nia . . . O-denis nia . . . Sakya-mu nia . . .*), varying constantly as he named the ceremony for which each series of gestures was prescribed. This one was for a marriage, this to consecrate the sacred elements, this to bless the head of a Buddhist novitiate. His eyes rolled, his tongue flicked in and out, he performed ballet steps with heel and toe. Absurd as it appeared, I could not deny that the man was an artist and an actor.

Now he shook violently the bell, or *Ghanta*, and swooped from somewhere amidst him the small brass thunderbolt of Indra called *Vajra* in Nepal, an instrument like a dumb-bell but with quadruple claws instead of a knob at each end. He banged the two together and sank the claws around the clapper of the bell, for the *Vajra* and the *Ghanta* are the Buddhist equivalents of the Hindu *Lingam* and *Yoni*, the male and female principles of life.

"*Aum . . .*" he chanted, "*mani . . . Padma . . . Hom*," an invocation which has never been satisfactorily translated but means, in sum, "O the Triform Godhead is in him of the Jewel and the Lotus." Both the Vajra thunderbolt and the invocation—*mantra* is the proper word for it—are of Hindu origin but have been adopted by Buddhism.

Dr. Henry Oldfield writes of the Vajra: "The scriptures say that a contest once occurred between Buddha and Indra, in which the latter was defeated, and had wrested from him his chief and peculiar instrument of power, the Vajra or thunderbolt, which was appropriated as a trophy by the victor and has ever since been used by his followers as the favourite emblem of their religion. Buddhists regard this as the sacred symbol of their divine master's victory over the King of the Hindu Heavens; and they venerate it accordingly, as the Mohammedans venerate the crescent, and as Christians venerate the Cross." It was another instance of the blending in Nepal of these two antithetic religions.

When I clipped the Leica to my belt again the old Lama was still going strong, enthralled by his own words and gestures.

"Thapa," I said, "don't think I doubt you, but ask the Lama of this place how old he thinks our Lama is."

The Lama raised his finger from the book, tapped it down lightly as he recited at length some story of which I could understand only the words "Gagan Singh." He stood in shadow for the sunlight now had slipped behind him to illuminate a brilliantly painted Buddha on the wall.

"One hundred and thirty years old," said Thapa. "He was present at the massacre following the murder of Gagan Singh. It is recorded."

When I looked incredulously at our Lama he seemed to be having a fit, for he was waving his arms like a windmill and prancing like a rabbit. "Boom!" he roared.

"That is the shot," said Thapa, "that killed Gagan Singh."

The old man was leaping about the monastery now, boozing and wailing and swinging wide his arms as he enacted the story of the terrible massacre of September 14, 1846. The jangling

of the bell in one hand was like the clash of swords, the brass thunderbolt in the other banged violently against prayer wheels, Buddhas, conch horns, to represent the firing from the old double-barrelled muskets. I sat in a corner out of harm's way, but the Lama Superior moved not an inch. He stood apart from the world, surrounded by the sunlit golden glory of his yellow robe, marking with a lean forefinger his place in the wooden book. He spoke absently to Thapa from time to time, and Thapa told the story to me. I listened eagerly, for it was from this historic massacre that the revolutionary new order in Nepal was dated. The King was deposed; the Prime Minister, the great Jang Bahadur, achieved the omnipotent control which has remained in his family ever since.

It was in 1846 that life in Nepal had come to such a sorry pass that the King, half-idiotic, attempted to rectify matters to his people's and his own advantage. The Queen, who acted as Regent for him, was midway in a reign of terror. The severed heads of ministers were popping out of the palace like peas from a pod. The Queen was a one-woman Gestapo who executed on the slightest suspicion whoever seemed to stand in the way of absolute power for herself and the eventual crown for her son. The Prime Minister, Martabar Singh, was assassinated by bullets and slashes of a dozen *kukris* ("swish-swish-boom-swish . . . glug . . . glug . . . glug . . ." said the Lama), his body hacked to pieces in the presence of the King and Queen and flung out of the palace window. Soldiers loyal to him were led into the swampy Terai and left to rot of the awful *awal* fever. Their families were beggared by the appropriation of all their animals, chickens, goats, buffaloes, which were sacrificed before the terrible image of Khal Bhairab, in the Durbar Square of Khatmandu. There the corpses remained, until the pariah dogs and the flies were done with them, a putrid warning to those who would oppose the Queen.

Among these, however, was the King, a half-wit and a coward, but both sensible and desperately brave enough to try to stop the concentric swirl of slaughter that was rapidly approaching himself. He feared the Queen, but even more

did he fear one Gagan Singh, the Queen's confidential attendant. This Gagan had originally been a menial in the palace and had risen on stepping stones of royal favour. Now with the execution of his namesake, Matabar Singh, the Queen made him Commander-in-Chief of the Army and vested in him, though without title, all the powers which the Prime Minister had had before.

The King stormed impotently about the palace, and tore the buttons from all his coats. If his honour was to be avenged and his very life preserved, it was necessary to destroy Gagan Singh. He disclosed his plan to his two sons by a former marriage and they in turn to several generals who were known to be still loyal to them. General Jang Bahadur was not consulted, for he was a nephew of the murdered Martabar Singh, and it was thought, mistakenly, that he was a follower of the Queen.

So on the night of September 14th, at ten p.m., Gagan Singh was murdered while at prayer in his own house. The hired assassin escaped in the confusion that ensued, but he thereby accomplished the death of thirty-one military chiefs.

The news of the murder was quickly brought to the Queen. Seizing the sword of state in her own hand, she rushed afoot to the late general's house, and, vowing vengeance on the murderers, proceeded to the Kot, or Court of Military Assembly, and ordered bugles to be blown for the collection of the troops, and messengers sent to demand the immediate presence of all civil and military functionaries of the State.

Our Lama came out of curiosity and was admitted because he was the only religious representative available. High on a balcony stood the Queen of Nepal, brandishing her sword in the torchlight and demanding the name of Gagan Singh's murderer. There was silence but for the padding of bare feet as Jang Bahadur, scenting new blood, surrounded the Kot with his own troops. Someone shouted the name of Bir Kishor Pandi, who was one of those the King had made privy to his plan, and he was immediately put in irons and chained to the gate. The Queen flew down the stairs, brandishing the sword of state, and would have hacked the chained man to pieces

had not her ministers restrained her, and our Lama, so he claimed, thrown his arms around the prisoner.

The Queen accused one man after another, each minister by name; they accused each other; any one of them might be the next to go. *Kukris* were drawn. Another of those ill-fated Singhs, Abhiman Singh, tried to escape to his troops when shots rang out within the building and one of Jang Bahadur's brothers split Abhiman nearly in two. Our Lama scrambled up the ladder that led to the council hall just as the crowd was rushing upon Jang. Jang's brothers and his bodyguard fought to his rescue, killing all in their way, slashing right and left even among their own men, battering out the torches until that small room became a black pit of slaughter through which the Queen's laughter, on the floor above, shrieked cruelly.

Outside, the troops of Jang Bahadur shot everyone who attempted to leave the Kot. Inside, Jan, seizing this priceless opportunity, was fighting not only for his life but for the possession of Nepal, in perpetuity. Down the corridors and through the little rooms his men pursued the unarmed ministers, hunting them like rats.

Our Lama fled screaming to the ladder, fell down it in the dark, and somersaulted as his head struck the ground below. He had just time before he fainted to crawl through the river of blood to the street where he saw the King slinking towards the house of the British Envoy, tearing buttons from his coat.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE PLACE OF THE DEAD

"THERE'S nothing like it! Anywhere!" said Armand, and all the expedition's hearts were chirruping because he was cheered again. "It's fabulous! It's as remote from the world we know as Mars! It's a town of the dead, but it's as vital as . . ."

"What is?" asked Leila. "If you don't mind . . ."

Armand looked at all of us as if we were wilfully misunderstanding him, for such was his preoccupation with a suddenly discovered and photogenic wonder that its name seemed unimportant.

"Oh . . . Pashupatti. One of the holiest spots in all of Hindustan. And it is here in Nepal. I spent the morning at the Maharajah's museum, making stills of the most extraordinary old books that were dated way before our Christian era. Old Vedas that made my head swim—I hope, by the way, that you got those river shots, Roy—and manuscripts which I swear are done in pictograph! Think of it! Central Asian pictographs here for the filming! Incidentally, Dave, you'd better check this with Colonel Rand, and if he confirms it get some colour stills. Anyway, Thapa took me past Pashupatti on the way back and it's the most . . . Look, are we going or not? By the time we get our stuff set up, it will be five o'clock. The long shadows will be fine about then, but in another half-hour they will stretch clean across the gorge."

No one asked what shadows or what gorge, for this exuberance was too precious to meddle with. Jack went whistling out to the Dodge, reset the carburettor almost in the time it took us to squeeze in, and we were off in a flurry of jay-walking hens.

The reset carburettor showed its own exuberance and carried us through the Durbar Square to the terror of all the populace but one, an albino dressed in pink who was sitting on a high platform and making insane dance gestures with his hands.

A colleague for the Lama, I thought, but just then Armand's quicker eye went past him and he called to Thapa to stop. Behind the pink boy on that stone platform was suspended what must be the largest drum in the world, fully eight feet in diameter, with a drumhead of mottled greyish leather.

"Rhinoceros skin," said Thapa. "The Maharajah shoots him."

"When is it beaten? Can we film it?" Armand was out to wring the soul from Nepal by now.

"In the morning," Thapa replied. "It calls the people to their prayers."

We spun on again, out of town, dividing the crowds of women who were on their way home to the hills after a day's imperceptible marketing. They might have exchanged only a handful of beans for a carrot, or a few pounds of uncarded wool for a bit of cloth woven by their more patient urban sisters. But they were happy. They chatted gaily, swinging strong mountainy hips while the sun flashed on their ear-rings and nose rings.

Down we went to the valley where the most sacred Bagh-matti River meanders from the hill bordering Tibet to the Indian province of Behar. The legend tells that Kaskat Sand, the fourth mortal Buddha, ascended Mount Sheopuri during a pilgrimage to Nepal, and there he met a party of traders coming down from Bhot, which we now call Tibet. They were cocky fellows, well-to-do, bringing all kinds of wonderful trade goods for barter with the Nepalese, blankets of yak hair, crystals, agate, turquoises, gold dust, gold and silver ores, ponies, watch-dogs, and sheep. The sheep carried loads of rock salt, that precious commodity, upon their backs.

The traders were inclined to scoff at the old ascetic, Kaskat Sand, but they made camp with him, and before the night was over, before any of them had slept, before Kaskat Sand had reached midway in his quiet conversational preaching of the Buddhist faith, they all were begging him to initiate them into it. They would build a shrine right here, they said, and sacrifice all their trade goods, with the exception of the animals, which Buddhists may not kill. They would inlay a shrine with their precious stones, and spread their carpets on its floor, and leave

their salt where the lean wolves could get it. And one of them, an exceptional artist, would fashion an image of Buddha from the great rock which was protecting them from the wind.

Kasat Sand would baptize them, he said, but nowhere could they find a drop of fresh running water. So he placed his hand against the rock, and pressed his thumbs beneath it, and when his prayer was ended there rushed forth instantly a cataract of water in which he proceeded to baptize the new disciples. They were as good as their word, for all that winter they laboured in the snow to cut an image on the rock. They enshrined it handsomely, but the shrine has mostly crumbled now, and the spring which was formed from it has grown through the years to become the sacred Baghmatti River.

There was a sudden blowing of conches and horns as we drove through the streets of Pashupatti, but it was not for us. We were not welcome at all in this purely Hindu community. There was a funeral arriving, a pre-funeral, as it were, for the man on the litter was not quite dead.

The long cortège wound past us, the trumpeters in front with long wooden Tibetan horns, bound with brass and semi-precious stones, belling at the end in true horn fashion but holed like a flute. The dying man was carried by four pink-turbaned fellows on a litter. Torches were propped in each corner of it, and their sparks spattered over the winding-sheet. Behind came men with tiny drums, and behind them came the mourners, looking more bored than bereaved. After the procession had passed we went into the labyrinth of Pashupatti's shrines.

Here is literally a city of death, yet it has a weird unworldly loveliness. The river runs through a gorge in the centre of it and disappears on each side into canyons so narrow and so dense with arching foliage that the water there can scarcely be seen. In the cliffs are cells, tier upon tier of them, arduously chiselled by the fakirs of ten centuries who have come to absorb the beneficence of the river and meditate through all their days upon life and death. They have paled in the gloom of the caves and canyon, and when you see them climbing laboriously up their frayed rope ladders they look like nothing so much as three-

toed sloths. Like animals they peer from their dens suspiciously. Their hair is matted. They are ulcerous and foul. They are very holy.

The canyon walls diverge as the river comes to the place of the temples, and along the left side rise courts and squares at various levels, each cluttered with temples, shrines, stupas, topes, with images of the gods. The great temple of Pashupattinath is in the middle of this religious welter, surrounded by immense walls to deter the gaze of the unbeliever. But the temple roof glitters gold above, and over the wall can be seen the golden prongs of a huge trident, the sceptre of Shiva, forty feet high. The temple is said to commemorate the flight of Shiva in the form of a gazelle on a day when he had wandered the earth without his trident and so could not defend himself against the demons. He took refuge in the sacred wood called Shleshmantaka, in the remains of which Pashupatti now stands.

Somewhere within these walls, we knew, was the colossal statue of Nandi, the sacred bull of Hindustan, heavily plated with gold, which several envoys of a hundred years ago had described, but we were forbidden to see it. At first Hospitality claimed it didn't exist; there was no kneeling bull ("Kneeling, eh?" said Armand). Then there might be a bull, and finally there was indeed, the most sacred, the most beautiful, the most magnificent god's image in the world, Hospitality admitted, almost in tears but we might not go near it.

Even Thapa was adamant. Once, he explained, a German geologist had forced his way into the temple and looked at the bull, and the Maharajah had been obliged to pay nearly a lakh of rupees (about \$40,000) to have the precincts cleansed by the holiest men in India and Nepal. Since then it had been forbidden for non-Hindus even to glance at it through the secret door.

But a gateway opened on the other side of the steep stone stairs and I had a momentary glimpse of the astonishing life within. It was a grassy court surrounded by brown *sal* wood buildings, webbed with carvings and anciently decayed. A dozen *saddhus*, nude but for gee-strings, sat on the grass or lolled in the shade of the walls or paced back and forth aimlessly.

One wore antique glasses and stared at the sun as he walked, turning at the corners of the court with his eyes always full upon it. One, had pig-tails so long that they dragged on the ground behind him, for he had woven his hair combings back again in the belief that he was thus insuring his integrity. There were young men and old, all bearded, but the youth who caught my eye was a bronze-whiskered giant in a leopard skin. He bared his teeth at me, yellow teeth with food caked between them, half crouched and paced towards me like the beast whose skin he wore.

I held my ground and rubbed the sweat from my hands against my trouser pockets. I could smell him before he reached me, and as he advanced I wondered whether I would be able to smash in those teeth before they bit me and gave me rabies. But he stopped, and put out his hand to caress my shoulder tenderly.

He led us without a word down the stairs to the river and stood thoughtfully by while we filmed the colourful crowd at the ghats. Continuous steps led up from the water to a long pavement where groups were gathered around the sellers of flowers and temple offerings. Some sold coconuts, the emblem of female fertility, brought over the mountains from the Indian shore; some sold rice by the dozen grains. Men, women, and children swarmed to bathe in the sacred river, to drink its cleansing waters. With the greatest of dignity the girls would raise their gorgeous saris as they waded out, hold the cloth in their teeth, scrub themselves mysteriously under water and gradually let the saris descend as they emerged. Some threw coins to the Baghmatti, and the husky youths whose livelihood was the retrieving of them slipped into the water quietly, as if to relieve a goddess of baubles for which she had no further use.

The life of Pashupatti had a quality which was at the same time vivid and serene, gay and grisly, the great crowds worshipping in gladness at the flanks of the sacred bull or in the life-stream and the death-stream of the river. But within the cloistered cells along the pavement of the river bank lay princes and beggars, hoping with all their hearts for one thing only, that they should die neither too soon nor too late but at that moment

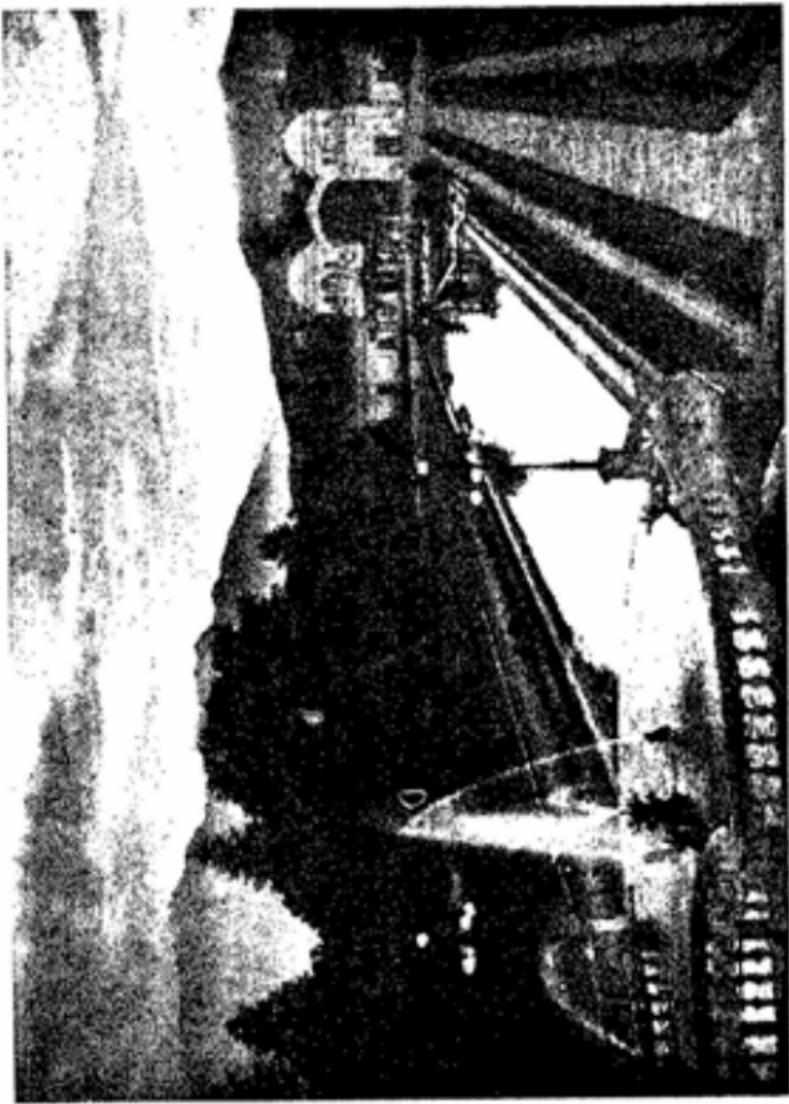
of their souls' dusk, between waking and dreaming for ever away, when the *gurus* should immerse their feet in the sacred river.

To us, it seems a strange ambition. To the Oriental there is the fulfilment of a proper destiny in being dragged from one's death-bed, jolted over the mountains in a basket, and decanted into a river which is chilled by the Himalayan snows. All the long life long, he'll say, death is at my feet; now let it chill them gently in these good waters, that my heart shall be prepared for its embrace.

Heaped into corners, sprawled against walls engraved with demons, lay the dying. Many were near skeletons already. I envied them their faith, but I thought, too, how terrible it must be to lie here testing one's soul, plucking at it with the mind to see if it were loosening from the poor body, saying, in effect, "Soul, are you ready? If we go now to the river, will you leave quietly, or will you torture me still?" And when the soul is ready, the body that bears it is borne down the steps of the ghat to a slanting slab of stone where it reclines, its feet laved by the goddess of the waters as the feet of the poor were laved by Christ, tenderly and sweetly until the soul departs.

The wild *saddhu* who had not bitten me led us across the bridge to an assembly of temples and shrines that were as austere as those of the other bank had been gaudy, row upon row of grey stone shrines dedicated to Siva. As I gazed at them there came suddenly a hideous sound behind me and just over my head. A dozen sacred rhesus monkeys had found me out and were making a terrific racket of either welcome or menace; I couldn't tell which. Leila was feeding them corn which the *saddhu* had procured for her, and when he whistled a hundred more came leaping from shrine to shrine down the hill, swinging in the trees above them, loping like dwarfs on the stairs. One old fellow, whose hind legs had been broken in some monkey battle, walked laboriously on his hands for a few yards, rested, swung himself on to his hands again, and finally came to sit peacefully at my feet, his mouth open to receive the kernels as I dropped them.

Roy set up his camera between two huddled images of the



"The gardens of the Maharajah of Nepal



My little girl

sacred bull and started to film the increasing swarm of monkeys.

"Coo! Coo! Coo!" called the *saddhu*, and the monkeys came rollicking down from the temple roofs and up from the shrines by the river, mostly females with babies like minute jockeys riding on their backs, or hanging on for grim life under their bellies and trying to feed *en route*. For these hundreds of females that swarmed around us there could have been no more than a couple of dozen males. They were twice the size of their ladies, long-fanged and fierce to snatch the corn from our hands. There were three tribes of them, said Hospitality, which must be fed, at government expense, on three separate occasions each day, for there was a feud among them which made it impossible to feed the three tribes together. The criss-crossed scars on the faces of the old warriors attested that.

Leila was in the thick of the milling animals and stooping to pick up a baby which seemed a day or two old. It was no more than eight inches tall, a twisted and pitiful creature, abandoned by its mother because its spine was broken and it was paralysed from the waist down.

Painfully it dragged its body from step to step, its legs limp behind it. It made mewing noises as it reached for Leila's hand.

Armand cried suddenly, "Leila! Be careful!"

I lowered my camera to see three savage males snarling at us from the roof of a temple, and a fourth jumping up and down with fury.

"I can't leave it like this!" Leila protested. "We've got to do something!"

Roy whirred his camera to catch a scene as frightening as any I had ever beheld. Every monkey had dropped its corn, and the hundreds of them, fangs bared, were pacing slowly towards us; and though they were small, that army seemed as terrible as the little Gurkha infantry must have been to the immense Englishmen who once had attempted to invade Nepal.

"I'm all right," said Leila. "Keep on cranking, Roy." But she was over-confident. She had just touched the crippled baby when a ferocious beast hurtled through the air and landed upon her shoulders. Another one leaped for her throat. A

dozen screaming females plummeted from the temple tops. All hell broke loose in the small shapes of a score of monkeys leaping upon Leila and tearing at her legs. We could scarcely get to her because of the barrier of brown bodies between us. There were hundreds of them now; all three tribes must have joined forces against the alien enemy. Armand was shouting and ploughing forward, but I couldn't hear what he said. An occasional monkey was snapping at me now, although they knew that Leila was the one they must destroy. I kicked and smashed at them, hoping to God the Hindus would stay out of this, for we were unarmed. Jack was beating them down with his topi. Roy was making wilder noises than they were and slashing them with a camera strap.

I looked for Leila. She had fallen and disappeared beneath a squirming, screaming, tearing hill of monkeys. She couldn't last. They would kill her in a matter of moments if we didn't reach her.

Armand was fighting closer, kicking up monkeys like ploughed earth from a furrow, while I worked as near to him as I could, catching the beasts by a leg or a tail and flinging them into the sacred Baghmati. It was like fighting an army of maniacal children; you couldn't loose their hands from your clothes nor their small sharp teeth from your flesh when they had gripped it. Armand's face was covered with blood when he bent over the writhing pile that had Leila in it, somewhere.

"The tripod!" he yelled.

"For God's sake, the tripod!" I yelled to Jack. It was thrown from hand to hand with the precious Akeley still upon it, until Armand clutched it by one leg and swung the heavy camera against the animals. It catapulted them away. We could see Leila, bloody and limp on the ground. Another swipe with it and a dozen more fell away. My own hands were so thick with blood that I could scarcely hold them to sling them into the river now. Back and forth like a pendulum Armand swung the tripod and camera, throwing monkeys to right and left—one square in my face—battering in those demoniac little brains that had one thought only, to tear to ribbons the hateful soft flesh on the ground.

We cleared a space around her. One by one we beat off the bigger males until the last of them gave up and retreated to the temple roofs.

Armand knelt beside the bloody body of his wife, his breath rasping like a grindstone, and tremblingly turned her over. Her torn hands held her hat tight to her face.

"All right, Leila. It's all right. They've gone."

Slowly her hands lifted the hat away. She tried hard to grin.

"Don't ever tell me I fainted," she said weakly. "Because I didn't. Am I all in one piece?"

Miraculously she was. The monkeys had torn her tough khaki clothes to shreds, but they had bitten her seriously in only a few places, mostly on the back. What had begun as an attack upon her had apparently become a tribal battle with her as the battlefield, a mass of bodies packed so tight that they could do her no great damage. She was bleeding freely and her scalp was splotched with red where the hair had been torn from it, but she was, thank God, alive.

Thapa and Hospitality were nowhere to be seen; the crowd of threatening Hindus was responsible for that. They were crossing the bridge towards us, towards the infidels who had defiled their holy ground and flung sacred monkeys into the river.

"Here we go again," said Armand, reaching for the tripod. But when the crowd had almost reached us, our *saddhu*, our blessed beggar, swooped Leila to his filthy shoulder and made a way with her through the crowd. We followed at his heels, lugging the smashed equipment. We reached the car, where Thapa and Hospitality were calmly sitting. And we drove home fast.

It was not at all a good sign when the gifts of fruit, venison, and rotten eggs abruptly stopped coming to us from the Maharajah. It was a very bad sign indeed. Even Hospitality would not say outright that the battle of the monkeys was in any way our fault, for it was obvious that Leila had tried to help the crippled youngster; but we had caused confusion, and that in itself was bad. We had disrupted a small part of the peace of the

valley; our simple presence had done it, the presence of the foreigners whom the Maharajah and his forebears had so rigidly excluded for fear of just such a small contretemps as this. The damage we had done? We had been foreigners in the public eye, people to wonder about, to cause talk in the bazaars and speculation as to how the world was whence we had come. Was there perhaps a pleasanter and richer land beyond the mountains? Even though we were in no way to blame, even though this was remote Nepal, we had sinned against good taste by being spectacular.

Colonel Rand leaned thoughtfully upon his knees as we travelled in his large car to see the pools of Narain, the god.

"I'll talk to His Highness," he said, "and see if I can explain it. The deuce of it is that he may be willing to believe that you don't kill sacred monkeys for the fun of it, but it may be hard to get the people to believe. That's the point. There are two sides to it, one that you, inadvertently, may have stirred up the Nepalese, and two, that they may some dark night stir you into mush. You're the guests of His Highness, and so of course he can't take a chance on that."

Leila twisted in her bandages. "Do you mean seriously that could happen?"

"I certainly do. The Maharajah himself admits that the fanatics are beyond his control, and here, as in India, one man out of every dozen is a religious fanatic. Perhaps you don't realize that you owe your lives to that grimy *saddhu* who carried Mrs. Denis through the crowd."

Armand grinned. "I realize it, all right. I sent him one of our special chromium-plated medals as a reward. Thapa says he loved it, but what he'll pin it on I don't know."

The water gardens of Balaji are situated about two and a half miles from Khatmandu, at the foot of the prong of mountains which the god Narain, like the Buddhist priest already mentioned, pierced to let water issue and assuage a terrible thirst. It was the god's festival this day, but it had not yet begun. We walked through a grove of green bamboo and past a Tantric temple to an idyllic acre of ground. This, said Roy, was truly Shangri-la. Set in smooth greenswards were the rectangu-

lar pools, vivid with the many large Asiatic carp which the pilgrims had fed since immemorial time. Some had yellow bodies with bright green fins, and some were bronze with fins of purple. They lolled in the water, thinking holy thoughts, till one of them lazily died and turned white belly upward. Then the mob was upon him, tossing his body from cruel mouth to mouth, and in less than a minute there was nothing left but a wraith of bone.

All the pools were fed with crystal-clear water from rows of ornamental stone spouts, the *makaras*, the heads of the beast that is half dragon, half dolphin. Children laughed beneath them, and screwing up their faces to imitate them spat water at each other. An old woman bearing on her back a load of wood that could not have weighed less than a hundred and fifty pounds washed out her mouth at a fountain, rinsed the sweat from her face and again took up the journey to the mountains. She would no longer be tired after drinking the nectar of a god.

"Here's the pool of Narain I was telling you about," said Colonel Rand.

I thought at first there was a corpse in that pool, so cunningly sculptured was the god and so cleverly placed, half in and half out of the water, that the movements of the fish and the wind ripples gave a semblance of life to it. He reclined full length upon a bed of stone serpents which seemed actually to writhe about him.

It is believed by the Nepalese that the god himself lies thus in a pool near the top of the mountain Gosainthan. The only European ever to have seen it is, I understand, Dr. Henry Oldfield who partially explored Nepal in 1851. He describes this lake or pool called Nilkhiat which holds in its waters "a large tawny-coloured rock, of an oval shape". The worshippers of Narain (Nilkhiat, Siva, Mahadeo, depending on the avatar you prefer) standing on the shores of the sacred lake, believe this rock to be the god. But all see it with eyes that are feverish and fatigued, for the journey to Gosainthan is always a perilous one. Landslides are common because of the melting of the snow; and many a pilgrim has been buried beneath them. The track is precipitous and narrow, the cold intense. The huts of the

Bhotiya tribes are found no longer beyond ten thousand feet, so that the hundreds of pilgrims who flock up the mountain during the season of pilgrimage must fight for the icy caves. It is no wonder then that visions appear to them and that the god to whom they have travelled these heart-breaking miles should seem to rise from his cold couch.

But there are degrees of piety, and those who had insufficient to make the climb brought the mountain to Mohamet, in the Nepalese fashion, by constructing two tanks with stone images of Narain in the valley. Two hundred years ago the first was built at the village of Budanila Kantha, but somehow there grew the legend about it which maintained that should the reigning monarch of Nepal ever visit this stone image his death would follow immediately. Therefore, the second pool, fed from the same source, was constructed at Balaji, so that the Maharajah might worship with impunity.

"The festival will be starting," said Colonel Rand, as we stood gazing at the image, each of us dreaming of what a superb film there would be in that pilgrimage to one of the highest and least accessible shrines in the world; the half-nude pilgrims with their staves, fighting the wind-swept snow, the bitter battles for the shelter of the caves, the mirages of exhausted minds, the false peaks, the mountain spectres, finally the true lake and the pilgrims kissing its waters and sacrificing at their edge the goats which they have carried warmly blanketed while their own bodies froze.

The Colonel divined our thoughts. "You'd like to go? Of course you would. I hate to remind you that I have been permitted to travel only twelve miles from my embassy. In the first place His Highness is unwilling to have us learn how little control he has over the tribes that live outside his capital valley; you'd probably be killed by Tcherpas or Bhotiyas just to see if your meat was white like your skin. And furthermore there are rites performed by the primitive tribes which His Highness deplores and would prefer foreigners not to see. He has helped these people immeasurably. He is an admirable man and a sovereign genius, but he has had terrible odds to contend with."

The car was climbing a hill towards the perfect square of

cypresses which crowned it. Colonel Rand blew the toughest smoke ring I have ever seen. It went over our heads, unbroken, and drifted above the scattered procession of people who were climbing to perform their devotions at the feet of the god Narain.

"I'm afraid we're out of bounds," said the Colonel.

Children were labouring upon the road we travelled, tots from about six to ten, carrying upon their backs small baskets which they filled with the earth washed down from the rice fields and dumped in the ruts. It was child labour; it was gruellingly hard; but it trained these peasant kids to the trade which was one of the profitable few that were open to them; they would become porters on the mountains of Nepal. It will be they in the future who will carry the inevitable locomotive across the minor Himalayas, which, still, I hope, will not be spanned by road.

"His Highness is rapidly improving the roads of the valley," said Colonel Rand, "the few of them that there are, but the trail in from India is deliberately kept poor as a deterrent to invasion. I have heard stories of another trail, a very easy one, along the course of the Baghmatti River all the way from Behar to Khatmandu, but no European has ever been permitted to follow it."

We arrived at the cypresses and a scattering of houses with red tile roofs.

"This village is known," said the Colonel, "as Budanila Kantha, or the Hill of the Goitre to those who are lucky enough not to live here."

Here again we found that incongruity which is peculiar to Nepal: a people happy, self-sufficient, needing nothing which their gods and the good Maharajah had not supplied; peace and sweetness and light seemed to be theirs when you saw them suddenly, and when next you looked you saw sheerest horror. The Hill of the Goitre had attracted to it the most monstrous human beings in Nepal. Goitre was prevalent, and double goitres and goitres overlaid by boils. Cretins, imbeciles, idiots, dwarfs, went flapping around us as we climbed to the foot of the shrine. A pock-marked little girl with eyes as sweet as pansies

tried to straighten her crooked body when she smiled at me with those soft eyes. One of her legs was so short, the result of infantile paralysis, probably, that her body was pitched to that side at an angle of nearly forty-five degrees. I took her hand in mine and led her within the walls which surrounded the Narain pool.

Armand is a man of quick understanding. He blinked as he saw my warped little girl, but he also saw her hands and her eyes and the fierce hunger that shone in them. And I blessed him for saying quietly, "Of course we'll use her, somehow. She needs that. Give me your camera; I'll take the stills for a while."

The child and I wandered idly within the enclosure of brick and moss, not looking at the pool just yet, but growing accustomed to one another, I to a girl of ten with a horrible deformity, she to a pink alien whose language sounded like monkey chatter.

So we wandered among the mass of God Narain's devotees, among the gowns of gold and violet, of black and silver, stooping beneath coloured parasols that made such a splendid world, with the sun shining through them, as I had seen through bits of broken bottle glass when I held them to my eye, at this child's age. We bought a pancake *chupatti* from an old whiskered fellow who was frying it over a flame hardly larger than that of a match. He smiled at us as my broken child pressed it eagerly into her mouth.

Large and little bells were suspended everywhere. She rang them devoutly, and rang them again for me who might not touch them with my strange hands. Once when we stood still, gobbling *chupatti*, she leaned her cheek quickly against the green moss of the soft red brick wall, and once, squeezing my hand a little, we passed a dribbling Mongolian idiot and she looked up and smiled, shaking her head in pity of him.

There was the sound of musical instruments at the entrance to the walled garden. The bells stopped ringing. The shush-shush of whispering died as all heads were turned to the gate. Three elephants, caparisoned in gold and red velvet, with embroidered masks over their faces, lifted their trunks while from the central one an old man descended. He was simply dressed in tight-fitting black trousers and long black jacket that

buttoned to the throat, and there was great dignity to him as he paced to the pool of the god. Attendants followed with tall fans of peacock feathers. They flung sandalwood incense into the air, where the rich scent of it was spread by the fans.

My child made a tremulous sound and led me to one corner of the pool, where I found myself in the midst of the expedition. Not only the Akeley but the sound camera as well were set up, and Armand was whistling softly into the microphone to test his controls. I disengaged my hand from the child's, picked up the colour camera and gave the Ikonta to her, showing her how to watch the scene through the magical peep-hole on top.

She smiled; it was glorious when she smiled. She was entranced by the tiny theatre of the lens. The old prince went slowly from bell to bell, making obeisance at each, until he came to the steps leading down to the pool. A servant followed him—a young man with a goitre, I noticed—as he descended to the feet of the great god sleeping in his bower of snakes upon the waters. This image was four times the size of the one we had just seen at Balaji, and infinitely more holy.

I heard the clicking of Roy's Akeley and the whirr of the sound camera. The ear-phones were slung around Armand's neck; sweat beaded his forehead. His eye was strained at the camera window but one fist waved none the less belligerently at Hospitality who was doing a dance of anguish because, I assumed, he had had no instructions to let us film the *puja* to the god Narain.

The old prince removed his shoes on the bottom step and flung the garlands which his servant carried upon the stone figure. He kissed the feet of the god three times and cringingly crept up its gigantic body, dropping flowers the while, until he reached the forehead, which he marked with the three white parallel lines that are the insignia of Siva. Then all over the courtyard rose the chant of "*Narain! Narain!*" while he backed slowly to the steps again, sprinkling rice on the god and in the water that was his home.

Hospitality, resigned, was whispering, "This god grew all by himself, without the hand of man."

In an instant the crowd had gathered again and the old

prince was gone to the sound of Gurkha music and the faint plod of elephants down the road. The court thronged with the *puja* pilgrims and the weird inhabitants of the village, the goitrous, the monstrous, the dwarfs. I turned at a choked cry behind me. My child was staggering away into the crowd, and the Ikonta lay where she had dropped it. She seemed to grope her way forward, clutching blindly for the wall by the pool, and to my amazement the crowd parted before this deformed and humble peasant girl.

She groped for the great bell and rang it weakly. It nearly jerked her from her feet. She fumbled, step by step, to the supine god of the pool and made her way along its body until she reached its head. Hands pressed flat together in the prayer gesture common all over the world, she bowed her forehead to touch that of the god, then held the grey cheeks tightly with her small fingers. Her body began to shake; sobs rushed through it; she trembled so violently that I feared she would fall into the pool.

Hospitality's mouth was open, Thapa's hands were raised in prayer.

As suddenly as the tremor began, it ended, and from all the crowd burst the cry of "*Narain! Narain-ah!*" The child turned and moved down the body of the god, up the steps, towards us; and as she passed into the press of the street my heart went cold.

She was limping no longer. She was healed.

Was it true? Was she really healed? I do not know. Perhaps we had been tricked. That was possible, but unlikely, for not even Hospitality had known that we were going to Budanila Kantha that day. Perhaps we had imagined the miracle, but that too was unlikely, as four of us had seen precisely the same thing. Perhaps, you will say, it was mass hypnosis such as, you have been told, is practised upon the spectators of the Indian rope trick.

All I can tell you is that she had come to the pool, deformed and limping and had gone away, apparently cured.

## CHAPTER X

SEPTEMBER 3, 1939

It was late in the evening of September 3, 1939, that we sat around the hospitable fireplace of Colonel and Mrs. Rand. The short wave radio was bringing news from London, a form of magic that made the healing of crippled children as comparatively unimpressive as a sleight with cards. We heard the booming of Big Ben across all of Europe and half of Asia, across the deserts of Turkistan and the Himalayan snows. The white usurper might be kept in person from Nepal, but nothing could intercept this aerial magic.

"Boong!" came the note of the world's most famous clock. "Boon . . . boong . . ." Mrs. Rand's eyes were misty as she looked towards England, through the mountains Nanda Devi and Nanga Parbat, five miles high.

"Mr. Neville Chamberlain," said the radio announcer, as intimately as if he were in the dining-room.

Colonel Rand's face hardened suddenly. There were straight lines around his mouth now; none at the corners of his eyes.

"I haven't told you, because I didn't want to distress you," he said, "but I had a message in code this morning from Delhi, from the Viceroy. I get such messages regularly, over the same wireless. But this morning's news was frightful. You will probably hear it now."

He refreshed our glasses, grimly, while we listened to Chamberlain, while we heard of England's entry into the war.

When the telephone rang suddenly at two a.m., it was like the scream of a shell through our conversation. We had forgotten there were telephones in this unworldy place.

Colonel Rand returned to the room with something of a smile around his taut lips. "Let's forget Hitler," he said. "I have a little good news for you, Mr. Denis. That was the Maharajah's secretary calling to say that His Highness will

receive you to-morrow. The full expedition, at the Palace, ten o'clock."

Yes, it was good news, but it seemed pretty trivial now.

"Thanks. Fine," said Armand, staring at the radio. His parents lived in Brussels.

"It does seem extraordinary to have telephones here," Mrs. Rand, catching the eye of her husband, remarked. "Won't anyone have a refresher?"

"Thanks," said Armand. "Fine."

"They were only installed a few years before we came here. Telephones, I mean. It was rather amusing, apparently. The Maharajah imported a man from India to do the work. Only the palaces and the homes of the generals were connected, of course. On the day when they were first to be tried out His Highness sent a command to every general, instructing him to be at the 'phone at three sharp in the afternoon, to await his telephone call. His Highness, of course, had been in England and knew how to use a telephone, but the generals did not. They waited in their homes in fear and trembling for the voice of their master, the Lord of Life and Death, to deign to speak to them, an extraordinary honour, for His Highness usually communicates with them through his A.D.C.s. There they sat, each one in a dither at his telephone, trying to remember the instructions for the use of it that had been sent him.

"At three o'clock the palace cannon was fired. The Maharajah, surrounded by awed attendants, picked up the 'phone and said 'Hello!' Everyone waited nervously for the answer from the Commander-in-Chief at the other end. But there was no answer. 'Hello, hello!' said the Maharajah. Still no answer.

"His Highness, in a towering rage, immediately dispatched two guards to the home of the unlucky Commander-in-Chief who had dared to ignore him. He tried another officer. 'Hello, hello!' But there was no answer there either. Two more guards were sent to bring in that poor man. The little Indian engineer who had installed the 'phones attempted to slip from the room at this point, but at a nod from the Maharajah he was seized and taken to the cells.

"By now His Highness was bellowing into the telephone,

trying to reach one general after another, and one by one all the generals of the Nepalese army were being brought, in fear of their lives, to the palace. I don't doubt but that there would have been another famous massacre if His Highness's intelligent grandson, Nara, hadn't carefully questioned both the generals and the guards who had brought them in. The generals swore that they had been waiting at the telephone at the appointed time. The guards vouched for them. There each of them sat, they said, holding the receiver to his ear and waiting for his master's voice. The generals spluttered; they had heard nothing, nothing at all.

"That was the solution to it, of course. They had all been so frightened of missing the Voice that they had grabbed the receiver the moment the cannon was discharged, so of course the lines were busy and no connection could be made. It was a narrow squeak for our fine generals. We muffle our 'phone when they visit us now. They may be the toughest little fighting men in the world, but the ringing of a telephone bell nearly scares them to death."

"His Highness sounds like an ogre," said Leila.

"Not a bit of it. He's a dear. It is largely due to him and the amazing discipline he has effected in Nepal that you find the country in such an extraordinary state of mechanical, if not cultural development. We respect him enormously, and are truly fond of him."

"He has been a long time," I said, "in giving us permission to see him. When we do go to-morrow I know Armand will manage the diplomatic niceties to perfection, but I have my own problem. I want to do a book on this amazing country and I need some official help. If he's not sympathetic it is going to be awkward. What interests him most?"

"Nepal," Colonel Rand replied. "His own people. And that has nothing at all to do with the fabulous personal income which he derives from them, nearly a million pounds a year. The coolie may never see him, but, like God, His Highness knows the coolie's every thought, and really works for his betterment. If you run dry on the subject of Nepal try big game hunting. All of you shoot, I suppose?"

There was that embarrassing question again. We had been worsted by it often in British India where not to shoot was not to be quite men.

"None of us like to shoot," Armand replied, "excepting Jack, and he may get over it before the expedition is done. I simply see no fun in shooting for what is called sport. It's obvious that we all love danger and adventure or we wouldn't be doing what we do, but personally, I had my fill of shooting in the last war, and Dave here, who used to make a living out of the gold watches he fought for in car barns, so he says, apparently boxed the murder out of his system. What hunting people never think of is that it takes a great deal more 'guts' to face a tiger or an elephant at twenty feet with a camera than it does to shoot him at three hundred yards. That must be obvious. We're protected by guns, of course, but an animal to us is much more valuable alive on film than dead on the library wall. When we get to Africa we'll be photographing big game, lion, rhino, elephant, at close quarters that would give most of your fox hunters fits. Why, we've filmed lions from a distance of ten feet! And with only one gun amongst us. Dave of course, carries his brass knuckles in case of emergency."

All right, all right, I thought, remembering the service of those beloved knuckles in a bar-room at Fiji, under a bed in Batavia, in a bazaar fight at Aleppo. It was unfair to asperse my knuckles, even though I had forgotten them during the monkey battle, and once I had used them effectively to open a can of milk for Leila. I should explain that this faithful tool was not the emasculated American variety; it was French, with spikes protruding from every knuckle. I loved it dearly.

To our astonishment Colonel Rand agreed with Armand. "But that's no good as a conversational wedge with the Maharajah," he laughed. "Talk gore to him. Ask him about his rhino and tiger. You might admire the paternalism he shows in protecting the villagers from tigers by shooting them, though there's no need to inquire why the villagers and even the soldiers are expressly forbidden to shoot the beasts themselves. He really is a great hunter, you know, if you'll permit the phrase. I think I told you that he shot one hundred and thirty-five tiger

during a month last year. He almost literally takes rhino—the most savage in the world, the *Sumatrensis*—by the horns, and he captures elephants alive. With the help of two or three hundred natives, of course."

"Sport, eh?" said Roy.

Colonel Rand chewed on his pipe, upside-down. "Well, you know, it used to be, in Jang Bahadur's time. They used to lasso wild elephants, actually. Jang lassoed several and brought them in tied between his own elephant and another tame one. The Terai, the swampy hunting ground, was such a hellish place with its beasts and its *aval* fever and its wild men—they used to catch these in cage traps, for slaves—that they took nautch girls to perform for them every night, and imported champagne which they would wrap in wet towels and give to the elephants to swing gently till it was cooled. I must say that His Present Highness used to shoot tiger when they were driven into a ring of tame elephants; he'd ride right in and pop them off; but recently he has been setting up a canvas ring inside the elephant ring and shooting from outside."

"Tut, tut," said Jack.

"I've just heard that he is now going to give up hunting for ever. Don't quite know why. But he'd been having all sorts of reverses. About a year ago a 'must' elephant, a sexually crazy rogue, charged through the Maharajah's camp when he was after rhino. It was a serious matter, for the Hindus can't shoot an elephant, as their god Ganesh has an elephant's head. So this savage brute had to be *shooed* away. Quite a job it was. The camp was wrecked and three mahouts killed. The creed doesn't say anything about letting mahouts be killed."

What a film that would make, I was thinking shamelessly.

"But the worst of all occurred on the shoot last March. It was evening and His Highness thought he saw a rhino getting ready to charge. So he shot at it, and it turned out to be a cow, a bovine cow. He had killed it, a cow, mind you, the holiest thing in the Hindu world. If Mount Everest had fallen it could have caused no more horror among the people. There were riots in the streets, and when the troops were called out they rioted too. I was on the *maidan* when the high priest of Pashu-

patti confronted that savage mob. It wasn't that they would even think of harming the Maharajah, you understand. They simply believed that Indra would bounce a thunderbolt into Nepal and blow them to bits. Their souls too; that was the rub."

Another magnificent scene, I was thinking; and so was Armand, apparently. Damn it, we were always out of season!

"But the high priest quieted them with a gesture. Then he announced that the Maharajah, in reparation to the gods, would give to the temple of Pashupattinath a life-sized cow whose body should be made of copper gilt, its horns and tail of solid gold, its hoofs and udders of silver, its eyes studded with rubies and the tip of its tail with pearls. A thousand people sighed with relief and awe.

"So the Maharajah, who had not been consulted at all, was forced by his duty to god and man to visit the jewellers and ascertain the value of this marvellous, synthetic cow. It was a staggering sum, as you can imagine, but he quickly turned it over to the temple, thus obviating any vulgar demand by the priests for actual cash. The cow was never built, of course, but the sin was expiated. I'm not sure, after all, that it would really be the best thing to mention big game hunting to His Highness tomorrow. . . . Look here, don't go. There'll be more news from . . . Well, good luck to you then."

At six in the morning, after three hours' sleep, I was wakened by a sound like that of escaping steam. I pawed my way through the tangled mosquito netting and saw that Jack and Roy were both up on their elbows listening. There came a small explosive sound like "O!" then another steamy emission followed in a moment by the dissyllable "orry."

"Sure enough," said Roy. "It's Hospitality."

"Sssso ssssorry," said Hospitality, leaning through the window and twitching recklessly at Jack's net. "You must be ready. It is the Day . . ." He backed out suddenly as Jack's great foot moved deliberately towards him. After two hours more of sleep we rose, bathed standing in basins, ate a breakfast of rice and eggs and put on the linen suits that had been freshly pressed for the occasion. We were a dapper-looking

expedition with the exception of my trousers which had been pressed crosswise like sailor pants. I had entrusted them to Thapa, who knew a *dhobi* immeasurably better than the one we had been employing. It was too late now.

Through the streets of Khatmandu and round and round the market we roared to the accompaniment of a fine fanfare on the horn as Thapa announced that this was a royal mission we were set upon. Hospitality beamed and bowed to right and left.

"Hoi!" yelled Armand, tapping Thapa with the gold snuff-box he was bringing to the Maharajah. "Straighten it out!"

We straightened out at fifty miles an hour, which was the noise limit of that ancient Dodge, and in a few minutes were being saluted by half a troop of soldiers at the Palace gate. Hospitality kept on bowing and I kept thinking of those flattened trousers in regard to the prestige of the expedition. They were a public scandal, I judged by Armand's eyes when he looked at them twice and turned hopelessly away.

Up the marble steps we walked, the trousers flapping, and down the long colonnaded porch, Armand and Leila first, moving with poise and dignity, then Roy and Jack with me between them feeling like a bow-legged sailor. I sought desperately to revise the scholarly appeal with which I had planned to beseech official aid for my projected story of Nepal. Unless I could talk through a window it would sound silly any way I put it.

The door was opened for us by a colossally turbaned Gurkha. We were led to a broad staircase panelled with a poster-type mural depicting at a length of sixty feet the courage of Jang Bahadur on an occasion when he was thrown from his elephant and had to shoot the tiger as it leaped over his head. In front of this on the middle stood a stately old man, beautifully dressed in European clothes and wearing a modest medal of some sort in his lapel. As we had not seen even a photograph of His Highness we had a moment of indecision as to whether this was he, come half-way, in a democratic fashion, to meet us. He shook hands all around.

"How do you do?" he said. He walked beside Leila up the stairs. "A good journey?"

Bright flunkeys made way for us as we entered a sumptuous reception room.

"His Highness the Maharajah of Nepal," announced the old man who had welcomed us, His Highness's secretary. The Maharajah came forward from the end of that immense and amazing room. Slowly he passed the great fountain that was made entirely of crystal. Slowly he passed the grandfather clock that also was made entirely of crystal, works and all. He had seemed haughty, arrogant, when we saw him upon his elephant a few weeks ago, but now he was benignity at its simplest. The patent leather shoes with cloth tops and buttons, the tight Nepalese trousers, the visored station-master's cap with its brooch of diamonds and rubies not quite in the middle of it, the old-fashioned gold bifocals, effused a comfortable atmosphere, not at all what I had imagined at the prospect of confronting one of the wealthiest and holiest men in the world: the Lieutenant-General His Highness (Ojaswi Rajanya Projjawala Sri Sri Sri) Maharajah Joodha Shum Sher Jang Bahadur Rana, G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., Honorary Colonel of all the Gurkha Rifle Regiments of the Indian Army, Prime Minister and Supreme Commander-in-Chief of Nepal.

The secretary introduced us and His Highness shook our hands in the Indian fashion, high and with a little jerk.

"How do you do?" said he also. "A good journey?"

He led Leila to a red velvet love seat in the centre of the room and sat beside her, while the rest of us followed (flap-flap-flap, I went; if I could have done a hornpipe I should have been more at ease) to a long row of chairs placed at right angles to them. On the other side and parallel to us sat the secretary, three high officers, and one of the Maharajah's legitimate sons attired in jodhpurs and the sort of loudly checked racecourse jacket which my wife has never permitted me to wear.

It was a desultory conversation, transmitted through the son and the secretary. First His Highness had some difficulty in establishing who was the Roosevelt, Armand or Leila, and then which of his own daughters had sent us to Nepal. He had forgotten already, there were so many of them. What was her name, the Princess?

Leila passed this buck to Armand and Armand to me. The question whirled through a maelstrom of exotic names, clicking and caroming away again, sinking into my desperate memory, until at last it came to rest against its answer.

"Saya Mala," I said. "Saya Mala Chowdree. Would Your Highness. . . ?"

But His Highness was looking happily at Leila and smiling in reminiscence. Yes, he remembered, it seemed.

Armand was talking now of the miracles of burden-carrying performed by the Nepalese coolies. Surely the healthiest people in the world, he said. The stamina of a nation should be judged by its meanest citizen.

The answer came circuitously back to us. Yes, when His Highness was in Milan he was impressed by the loads the peasants carried, so he encouraged it in Nepal. The people would be grateful one day, he said.

Did His Highness by any chance know, Leila asked, the Khan of Kalat, whom she had visited when she drove a truck around the world? He was the fattest man in Baluchistan and the strongest, a champion weight-lifter.

His Highness knew him indeed, but did she know the Lama Wangdi who could lift a man by his ears, without the ears coming off? That was really remarkable. And had she heard of the nun called the Thunderbolt Sow, the strongest woman in India fifty years ago, and almost as greatly revered as the Dalai Lama?

His Highness was on his feet now, and still talking of weight-lifting as he led us through one wing of the palace. The next huge room was a simple frame for two throne chairs which were upholstered in cretonne plush, if that is imaginable. The room beyond was small but memorable for the array of Major-Generals whom the Maharajah introduced to us as his sons, but if there was a day's difference of age among them I couldn't detect it. It was a very neat row of sons.

On the mantelpiece were photographs of Kings and Rajahs, above the affected signatures of Kings and the clean simple Sanscrit of Rajahs who were wise enough and generous enough to use the script still customary in Nepal. In the midst of them,

but back a bit, was a sleek portrait of Adolf Hitler, signed in ink, and dated 14 January, 1938. It would now be interesting to know what Adolf Hitler was doing upon that day.

The sons of the Maharajah, parallel as pickets, moved towards me as I was trying to remember Hitler's date without making an obvious note; they wanted to shake hands with me, but they did not smile. So I flapped away in my damned sailor trousers after Armand and Leila and Jack and Roy who had followed the Maharajah into the next amazing room.

The light was dazzling here, blaring like trumpets from every corner, blasting from wall to wall and so violently into my eyes that I raised them to the ceiling for relief and there saw a congregation of plaster angels, flat on their backs against it. Surrounding the room were a dozen caricatures of Armand who stood in the middle of it, for the walls were inlaid with carnival mirrors, the monstrous mirrors that pervert your body to that of a dwarf, a skeleton, a hyperthyroid, always an idiot, but the Maharajah was in the shadow of the hall beyond. Leila flicked from mirror to mirror, swelled and diminished, grew two heads where one should be, and I stood stock-still to observe at last how my trousers should have been pressed.

All this was distressing enough, in the chambers of a Maharajah, without the circular iron staircase, like a fire escape exactly, which corkscrewed into the ceiling between the shins of two cherubim.

The Maharajah's flashy son approached Armand from all sides through those dizzying mirrors.

"You will please pose for His Highness now," he said.

Leila asked with her most engaging smile whether it would be possible to film His Highness in the extraordinary helmet which everyone had heard of, though less than a hundred Europeans had ever seen. It is intrinsically the most valuable head-dress in the world, I believe, and is said to be insured by Lloyds for the equivalent of one million dollars in rupees.

The son said he thought we might film it. He would speak to his father. If we would wait a few minutes he would accompany us to the Thuni Khel, or big parade ground, where we might pose for the troops.

"That's luck," Roy grunted as we walked back past the photo of Hitler, the cretonne thrones, the crystal fountain, and the solid crystal clock which was inscribed:

"*Dulce et Decorum est pro Patria Mori.*"

When we reached the parade ground the Maharajah had already arrived, accoutred in khaki and astride a magnificent stallion. We set up our cameras and sound equipment beneath the enormous tree which for centuries had been the court of the early Rajahs. The Maharajah cantered past, while we busily "posed" for him, but we posed even better with our colour cameras when his favourite son, Nara Shum Sher Jang Bahadur Rana, who had solved the telephone problem, galloped up in a uniform of bright scarlet and black, wearing a fine feathered helmet and sitting a saddle of golden leopard skin. Cannon were fired; the band played, of all tunes, "It's a Long Way to Tipperary," and across our finders marched and re-marched two thousand troops. They may have been great fighting men but they were very poor paraders, and would be particularly unimpressive on film because they filed past in ranks of four. What we besought was a solid mass of them, a body of colour and organized action, but it was impossible to obtain, for they had been trained to march in narrow ranks so that they could climb the ribbony trails of the mountains.

Nara Shum Sher rode into the midst of us and announced that we might now pose for His Highness in the museum. Away he went and away went the Maharajah beside him. As quickly as we could we packed our bulky and delicate equipment and drove to the "museum" in the faithful Dodge.

We were led to the back door, the tradesmen's entrance, I should judge it, and followed the secretary into a galleried hall which was surrounded by life-size oil paintings of the royal family. They were made in curious ways, some with house paint, apparently some with the paint piled in spikes half an inch long so they might catch all the light there was in that dim hall and the better represent diamond buttons. Three, which Leila pointed out, nodding her head seriously and appreciatively, had photographic prints of faces pasted upon the painted necks.

An abattoir of hunting trophies lined the walls. One in particular caught our attention, the head of a gigantic rhinoceros which sat, like St. John's, upon a golden platter, for the back side of it had been sculptured and painted to depict all the gory innards which were seen when it had been amputated.

The secretary smiled when we admired it with constricted throats. In the cellar, he said, were heads and skins of animals piled four *guz* (four yards) high and weighing twenty *maunds* (1,640 pounds). The Maharajah had killed them all.

A strip of sunlight lay diagonally across the floor. It widened slowly and we turned to see the front doors opening. Between them, flanked by sons, stood the Maharajah, now wearing a dark blue suit to which was affixed a row of medals. The sudden sunlight revealed splendour in what had seemed little less grim than a waxworks gallery before. At the end of the room stood another pair of thrones—they seemed to be everywhere, ready for quick dealings—and marble columns grew like huge stalagmites from the sunlit floor to taper into the darkness of the high ceiling. A carpet of red velvet interwoven with gold thread lay before the thrones, and a tiger skin with jewelled eyes was spread before the door.

It was not this magnificence that held our eyes, however. It was the helmet, that great treasure of Nepal, which an orderly was passing to His Highness. He put it into Leila's hands while we all prayed she would have the strength not to let one million dollars' worth of frangible jewellery fall. She passed it back like a hot potato, and the Maharajah put it on, without a word, as beffited one's conduct in the presence of such beauty and power and holiness as was represented by this crown which had come down through countless generations of Maharajahs and Kings, from the God Siva himself, it was believed, to the Maharajah Joodha who wore it now.

There was not a millimetre of it that was not jewelled, mostly with diamonds and pearls. Over each ear hung a cluster of emeralds the size and shape of a bunch of grapes. There was an emerald as long and thick as a large man's thumb on one side, and on the back was another, the size of a cocktail sausage. The

ruby on top was an inch in diameter, blood red with a blazing globe of sunlight in its heart. Tawny bird of paradise plumes swept from the front to the back in a graceful arc.

His Highness turned slowly so that we might see the exquisite details of the helmet, the minute engraving on some of the flat emeralds, the double head of three-eyed Siva designed in diamonds, and the peacock that was made of dozens of small carved emeralds.

The secretary came forward but I was scarcely aware of him. "Do you wish to film His Highness," he asked, "with or without his specs?"

So brilliant was the helmet in the sun that the needle of my light metre ran beyond its scale, and so great was the contrast between the jewels and the Maharajah's clothes that we had to illuminate him from the neck down with our large sun reflectors. He shifted uneasily as that blast of hot light fell on him. He was trying to be sporting, but the sweat slid over his forehead, and between his heavy brows came the frown that condemned men to death. Roy and I worked furiously with five cameras, the 35 mm. Akeley, the 16mm. Kodak with colour film, two Leicas loaded with black-and-white and Kodachrome and the Ikonta for a long-shot still. Armand talked charmingly to the secretary, but the translation was lost upon the suffering Maharajah, and even Leila's smile, scarcely less dazzling than the helmet, did nothing to illumine the darkness of His Highness's mind.

"Cut it," said Armand, when the sons also were beginning to look grim.

We moved to the cool shadows. The Maharajah put the helmet carelessly over the horn of the gruesome rhino head. A golden *kukri*, the curved knife of Nepal was, placed in his hands and he in turn presented it to Leila with the second smile of the day.

The secretary translated. "His Highness . . . wishes . . . you to present this *kukri* . . . to your cousin . . . the President of the United States . . . with the best wishes of the Maharajah of Nepal. . . ."

Leila was unaware that Roy was still filming. Graciously

she accepted the splendid golden blade, and thanked His Highness on behalf of the President and ourselves. The doors swung slowly together; the band of sunlight was squeezed to a bright wire across the floor and then was dissolved by darkness. We packed and went out to face the credible reality of Hospitality and the dear shabby Dodge.

So far we felt, we had done tolerably well with the film, considering the bans and limitations placed on our activities. Day by day we had recorded the typical aspects of Nepalese life, seeking always to film what belonged to Nepal alone, and not India or Tibet from which so much of its culture derives and with which it is often blended. This was always difficult, and it was particularly so on the day when we went to film the great Swayambhunath Temple, the very core of Nepalese Buddhism surrounded by Brahmanism in its purest form.

The temple stands on an isolated hill about half a mile west of Khatmandu, and according to tradition was built by King Gorades nearly three thousand years ago. But the hill, itself artificial, dates back to the very beginnings of Nepal, so the legend avers. When the god Manjusri cleaved the Mahabharat mountains and allowed the lake to drain from what is now the Nepal Valley, he found a sacred lotus growing by the stream that remained, the Baghmatti River, as we call it now. So he planted around it a grove of trees which has lasted to the present day, the wood of Pashupatti, a shrine soon to become doubly sacred, when Mahadeo, a Hindu god, came through Pashupatti bearing on his shoulder the half burnt corpse of his consort, Parvati, and bits of her body fell on the ground here, thus sanctifying it.

The root of the lotus being protected by the wood, Manjusri buried the stem for the mile of its extent and built over the blossom the Swayambhunath Hill. The exact place of the root is now indicated by a silver Yoni, the female emblem, from which gushes a clear stream of water, and the blossom is represented by a perpetual flame kept in the temple of Swayambhunath.

Manjusri looked over his work and found it good. He had begun a nation and ensured a religion for it. He called it Nepal,

from the two words, *Ne*, meaning deity, the Adi Buddha, and *pala*, cherished—the Cherished of God.

The pilgrims from Tibet and India, after their long journeys, must confront the flight of six hundred steps leading up to the Swayambhunath Temple. At the foot of them were three stone Buddha's about thirty feet high and a *mandal*, a circular rock with Buddha's footprints engraved on it for the pilgrims to kiss. An old sheep was resting his chin between them. A cow walked with dignity up a dozen steps, changed her mind and came down again. Hundreds of monkeys scrambled over the stairs and the Buddhas, regarding us most inimically.

"Let's go," said Armand. We went painfully. Up and up we went, stone step by stone step. Up we staggered past ancient images of Garuda, Siva's bird, surmounted by small Buddha figures to show that the Hindu god is subordinate here. Two hundred and thirteen steps were behind us when we came to what must surely be the oldest gods in the world, a long rock and a round rock, unhewn, on each of which was simply painted two eyes.

"Gosh!" said Jack, "this kind of a tour would knock the religion out of anybody."

The ascent at first had been gradual but as we neared the top it slanted as close to the vertical as the steps of a step-ladder. Our faces were mottled white and red when at last, using our hands, we reached the golden thunderbolt of Indra, five feet long, that lay at the temple's base. We collapsed on the porch of one of the several small monasteries.

"I should have filmed that climb," said Roy. "How would you feel about . . ." We had not even the strength to look at him, nor did he have the breath to go on.

Swayambhunath Temple resembled Bodhinath in general form. It had the same solid hemispherical base of earth and brick, about sixty feet in diameter and thirty in height, supporting a square *toran* with a lofty conical spire divided into thirteen laminations of gold plate representing the thirteen heavens of the Buddhist cosmography. On the four sides of the *toran* were painted the eyes of Buddha, inscrutable, omniscient, benign. Bodhinath was severely simple in setting.

Swayambhunath arose from a veritable forest of smaller temples and shrines, mostly Hindu, of gigantic bells hung from granite arches, of innumerable thunderbolts on their lotus-shaped pedestals called *Dharmdhatu-mandal*, the homes of spirits. Gilt dragons guarded this majestic temple, and a blazing peacock watched over all from the vantage of a huge pillar cut from a single block of stone.

Though this was a Tibetan sanctuary the Indian shrines sprouted like mushrooms all around it, and at one corner of the sacred area rose a crumbling *sikhra*, a pyramidal tower with convexly curved sides, such as is found everywhere in the plains of India.

"The devil of it is," said Armand, "that there is no purely Nepalese religion, and yet this mixture of the religions of India and Tibet is purely Nepalese, peculiar to this country and none other in the world. Does that make sense? I'll have to clarify it somehow before I face an audience in New York."

Inch-worming up the enormous stairs, falling flat upon them, measuring his length, rising and falling again, came a pilgrim. With a sob of joy he reached the temple pediment, but he did not pause. He walked around it slowly, spinning the hundreds of prayer-wheels set into the cement. When he had made the circuit he sat down before a separate small temple and struck his head upon the ground in worship of some god we could not see, but whose name was evidently Devi Sitla, for he pronounced it over and over again.

These devotions finished, he looked around and caught the eyes of Armand. His own eyes lighted as if he had personally met his god. He struggled to his feet, a nude, emaciated horror with a beard to his waist, and sat beside Armand with a pitiful sigh. He reached for his hand and held it tightly. He put his head on Armand's knee and went blissfully to sleep.

We tried gently to pry him away, but it was useless. He sighed and Armand sighed. "What do I do about this?" He asked plaintively. "Maybe he's holy."

"He's crumby," said Jack. "I'll take him." He took him gently by the other hand, and pulled, but the old man stretched

like a rubber band before finally letting go. Resignedly he went off with Jack, but his sweet rheumy eyes looked back woefully at Armand. For the rest of the afternoon we had him with us, one or the other of us always holding his hand while the rest of the expedition filmed Swayambhunath. Armand was distinctly his favourite.

He was in Leila's care when she called to us to look down the stairs. Up came the eighteen devil-dancers we had selected three weeks ago and completely forgotten. They were full of *raksi*, Nepalese rum, I judged, by the energy with which they slung on their fiendish masks and began wildly leaping the moment they reached the top. The musicians came after them with a terrific squalling of flutes and horns.

"Fine!" Armand exclaimed. "This is a perfect setting for them, and that flight of stairs should keep the kibitzers away.

"Let's set up, Roy."

The first fine frenzy of the dancers waned quickly as the rum wore off. Armand flung down the ear-phones of the sound-recording apparatus and leaped among them, waving his long arms, kicking, pirouetting to inspire them to greater efforts, but they were so delighted with this performance that they raised their demon's masks, hiked up their star-spangled skirts and squatted. Here was a dance that *was* a dance, they seemed to think. The band worked harder and so did Armand. Jack and I hoisted the dancers to their feet again and we all danced except Leila who was busy Tarzaning from wall to wall of the enclosure, clearing off the spectators who had braved the stairs and now were spoiling our background. A young *saddhu* wearing only a leopard skin around his loins she allowed to remain as a natural property.

"Dave, see if you can get permission for us to shoot from that balcony."

Thapa and I entered the two-storeyed building that formed one side of the temple enclosure, and climbed a ladder—very few Nepalese houses have stairs—to the rooms along the balcony. An old man was cooking in the first. He flew at me in a rage as I tried to enter, for I, a foreigner, would poison his

food by my very presence. He was a Brahman, and I, of course, was lower than the lowest Indian caste, fouler than the Untouchables. In the semi-darkness of the next room a girl was lighting a trayful of candles from a taper. These were to be burned before the images in the various shrines, and so of course we could not go in there either. The third room was so deep and low that daylight could not reach its inner wall. Humbly we entered half-way and when our eyes grew accustomed to the darkness we saw four Tibetan Lamas sitting around a large copper cauldron which contained a small burning wick. Its pale blue flame barely illuminated the ghee on which it floated, the polished rim of the copper pot and the serene faces of the Lamas. Thapa hastily drew me away from this eerie scene.

That was the sacred flame, he whispered, when we reached the balcony, the light of Adi Buddha which has never been extinguished since it sprang from his brow at the beginning of time. From it the candles we saw in the next room were lighted. I returned to the temple courtyard sincerely awed and considerably shaken, for I had seen the flaming blood of Buddha. I had entered the heart of a world.

All afternoon we filmed the dancers, with sound and in colour, and took such shots as we were permitted of life in the precincts of Swayambhunath. Children made their small but intense devotions to the goddess Vajra Dhateswari of the Tantric cult. She had seven eyes, two in her face, one in her forehead, one in the palm of each hand, and one on the sole of each foot. A priest whose brow was smeared with ashes sat before the shrine of Mahenkal—one of the avatars of Siva—reading from the Vedas, swinging a bell with one hand and a thunderbolt with the other while a crowd of worshippers chanted in response to him and anointed the image with unguents. God Mahenkal, adamant, threatened them with a trident decorated with human skulls. In contrast to this Hindu worship of terror was the whole family of Newar Buddhists, children, parents, and grandparents, who circled the Swayambhunath Temple spinning the *manis*, the prayer-wheels, then knelt cheerfully together before the huge image of

Akshobya, the second divine Buddha, whose skin is brilliant blue.

Here was a welter of fantasy, of horror, colour, urgent movement, to appal the New World mind, an acre of holiness filled with the pilgrims of two faiths and a double faith, whose life was in death, in the ultimate escape from living by the route of Karma for the Hindus, by Karma and Nirvana for the Buddhists, by God only knows what confusion of means for the pilgrims who worshipped at those alloyed, equivocal shrines.

While the rest were packing I wandered back and forth through the narrow passages separating the various *vihars* at the circumference of the quadrangle, seeking a good foreground for a long-shot of the great temples. At every turn I faced another shrine, usually with a closely wrought grill of iron to protect the relic within. Rice had been thrown as offerings into them, and the monkeys were busy reaching for it, their arms extended far inside, their chins twisted back where the grill checked them. Out of the mouths of gods they were stealing, but when I approached any of these shadowy shrines even the children would rush glaring and panting in menace before me. Here a monkey was cleaner than a man.

We went down the six hundred steps slowly and cheerfully, for it had been a good day's work. Armand was whistling, and from somewhere in the sunset above us came the notes of a gong driving away the evil spirits which would now be prowling around Swayambhunath.

"By the way," Armand asked suddenly, "what became of my devoted old man?"

"I decorated him with some of the adhesive tape from the film cans," Roy replied. "I made a trident on his chest and an eye on his back. He was delighted. Last time I saw him he was still trying to re-arrange the eye. He was tied in such knots that I don't think he saw us leave."

Armand laughed. "Thapa, what was that little temple to which the old man paid his respects? It was certainly Hindu, although he did go to the Buddhist Swayambhunath first."

"Oh, that," said Thapa, the Braham, flinging a Buddhist rock with an eye painted on it at a sacred Hindu monkey, a

strange sort of ritual indeed, "that was the temple of the goddess Devi Sitla. The goddess of smallpox, you know."

Armand didn't whistle any more.

Now it was October, the month of Assan by the Hindu calendar and every night, as we listened grimly to Colonel Rand's radio, it became more and more evident that if we wished to reach New York by Christmas, adding on the way an African chapter to our film, we had better skip the Indian sequence we had originally planned, and get as fast as possible to Bombay. There was nothing more for us in Nepal, Armand believed, nothing of consequence which we had been permitted to film and missed. Colonel Rand advised us furthermore that the Indian Government did not look kindly upon moving-picture expeditions during times of war.

In addition to these good reasons for leaving Nepal as soon as we could, Hospitality arrived one morning with a long necklace of flowers for Leila. With His Highness's compliments, he said. Compliments nothing! It was such a floral necklace, bound with gold thread and dripping with tassels, as is commonly given by Indian princes to their departing guests.

It was a hint no guest of breeding could ignore. We packed up our equipment, and turned our backs upon Nepal.





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